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## OUR INDIANS AT MARSEILLES









MAHARAJAH SHER SINGH.

# OUR INDIANS AT MARSEILLES

BY  
MASSIA BIBIKOFF

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
MAURICE BARRÈS, DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

TRANSLATED BY LEONARD HUXLEY

*WITH 50 ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR*

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SON ALTESSE IMPÉRIALE LA GRANDE DUCHESSE

OLGA NIKOLAIÉVNA

HUMBLE ET RESPECTUEUX HOMMAGE  
DE L'AUTEUR

MASSIA BIBIKOFF



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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

M. MAURICE BARRÈS, the distinguished Academician, who saw this diary in MS., was so much delighted with it that he offered Mlle. Bibikoff his own article on the Indian troops as an Introduction to what she had written.

The Diary itself is jotted down with all the bright enthusiasm of a youthful artist fresh from the studio of M. Detaille, the celebrated battle-painter. The translation has aimed at keeping the writer's actual impressions, even though, as in the case of certain customs among the Indians, they are based on a misconception :—at keeping, above all, those many little touches which in their frank and simple directness, unstudied and unrevised, reveal an impressionable personality as genuine as it is unselfconscious.

L. H.

*November, 1915.*

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# OUR INDIANS AT MARSEILLES

## INTRODUCTION

BY MAURICE BARRÈS, DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

### A VISIT TO THE ENGLISH ARMY

#### THE GURKHAS AND SIKHS

I WENT to Ypres, Albert, Armentières, and a score of villages more or less ruined and depopulated. We rolled swiftly over these roads, bestrewn with branches cut from the trees by the shrapnel, and the English seated here and there on the edge of the ditch made signs to our drivers that they had better make haste. Was this out of concern for our security or their own, which might be endangered if the Germans noticed our little convoy and its cloud of dust ?

## Our Indians at Marseillès

We reached our destination and wandered about these living, shuddering replicas of Pompeii. We looked at the strange forms wrought by the whim of the shells. We were touched by the traces of humble homely wealth crushed under the ruins ; we talked cheerily with the children, who ran about unconcerned in the heart of a town now richer than ever in hiding-places ; we clasped hands with the few inhabitants who persisted in . . . working in this hell, and then suddenly in the midst of this destruction the destroyers resolved that we should think of them. An Aviatik flew over Ypres, pursued by bursting shrapnel that laid successive touches of cloud upon the lovely blue sky. They looked like chalk marks on a blue billiard table.

I have seen the Temple of Isis at Philæ, half drowned in the waters of the Nile, as it was left by the hammer of the Christians ; above Byblos, at the source of the river Adonis, ringed in by the sacred rocks, I have seen the Sanctuary of Aphaca, laid low by its enemies and an earthquake. The gods, the centuries, the river floods, the shocks

## Introduction

of solid earth had wrought less than a Prussian bombardment upon cities of brick. The famous Cloth Hall and Cathedral of Ypres are in dust upon the ground, the Virgin of Albert still hangs miraculously upon its shattered church. For desolation the world has no equal to this. You can dash headlong through these streets without fear of running over anybody.

This war scene is strange and pathetic, but from Belfort along the whole front I have seen it, all in the same desolation. The one essential is the soldier. Here I have come to see the Home and Colonial Forces of Great Britain, Kitchener's Army, and the Native troops too, towards which, I confess, my imagination turned eagerly ; these levies of Indians, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders, which make up one of the overwhelming surprises in this War of the Nations.

The first Indian I met was just outside a ruined village early one evening in Flanders. I was looking at the desolation under the lowering sky. A few women were pitching corn sheaves on to a wagon ; little cows were feeding along a hedge of

## Our Indians at Marseilles

willows ; there was a shiver in the aspens, when in the middle of the road I caught sight of a Punjabi coming towards me. He was stepping out at a round pace, like a country postman ; turban and khaki were soaked with rain and mud. Had he been dressed differently, with jewelled brooches sparkling at his neck and on his head, he would have looked like a king's son. It cheered us to look at him, but as for him—he had become such a native of these villages, a creature of these lowlands, that he went by without so much as looking at us. That same evening, in the sodden plain of Flanders, we were taken to see a company of Gurkhas going up to relieve the trenches. These sturdy little men were drawn up under the trees by the roadside. Their faces were of bronze, and nothing in them moved except the eyes. I should have taken them for Japanese. Some of them, if I mistake not, unite the flattened features of negro affinity to this type of the yellow race. They are mountain people. Their favourite weapon is a curved knife—a sort of sickle. In peace and war alike they carry it in their belts

## Introduction

and use it to cut boughs and build huts. "It works wonders in hand-to-hand fighting in trench warfare," I was told by their Colonel, as he bade one of them put this great dagger, or *kukri*, into my hands. The weapon roused my admiration no less than its owner. His wrinkled yellow face was expressionless. His eyes blinked like a wild animal's and seemed to avoid meeting one's look. "Poor Boches!" I remarked to the Colonel. And, sooth to say, they are wonderful fighters. They are said to see clearly at night, and their great art is to glide across the hollows of their mountain valleys and the slopes of the Himalaya so as to surprise their enemy and cut out his tongue. Such at least would be their natural tactics, only disciplined and tempered by British civilisation.

When they came over in November and December and saw the wide soaking plains where never a mountain broke the horizon to give them their direction, a depression seemed at first to fall upon their spirit. Did the rain and cold make them shiver in silence as our Africans so



## Our Indians at Marseilles

often do? Did they suspect some devilment in the appalling uproar of the big German guns? Be that as it may, the first ray of sunlight cheered them anew. It was an unexpected form of war, but still it was war. To-day they take their pleasure in it, and having got used to the Flemish climate, they creep at night through the mud towards the enemy's patrols like dripping tigers.

A couple of days after I had admired this mysterious infantry, these sphinx-like faces from the depths of Asia, I was given the opportunity of seeing the cavalry march by, Sikhs from the Punjab, tall and strong, dignified in feature, mounted on fine horses. Man and beast alike were in resplendent health. Unlike the Gurkhas, the Sikhs never cut their beard or hair. Their beard is rolled up curiously round their cheeks; their hair is twisted up and hidden under their high turbans. Here we see no more of those wrinkled eyes, whose look of being stuck slantwise into the face amazed me so much a couple of days since, but handsome regular features, faces of a long oval and clear and golden colouring. Hail

## Introduction

to our Aryan brothers in the garb of Magian kings!

Standing on a heap of stones by the roadside I watched these strange and beautiful beings from the East file past under the poplars of France. A peasant happening to come up with his cart, a French officer attached to the English Staff bade him draw up in the field at one side so as not to break the column, and it was curious to see this old man of our own country stepping out of the way of these astounding foreigners, whose quality and quantity he weighed with a friendly eye.

During the long monotony of their march past, stirring as it was to the imagination, I never ceased asking questions, one of which in particular was of the deepest interest. "What do these Indians think, Sikhs and Gurkhas alike? What conception of this war have they formed? What is it, and what are they fighting for?"

"Ah," said an Englishman to me, with a laugh, "they know the Boche is a foul beast!"

There is a deal of wisdom in this sally. After

## Our Indians at Marseilles

a year of war they are fighting in order to give blow for blow. Still I persisted. I was told, "They are fighting because it is the order of the Raj, and as a Believer obeys God, they obey the Government, the Raj which is their earthly Providence, the corner stone, the one central point beyond dispute. Just as God has said, 'Thou shalt not steal,' the Raj has said, 'Thou shalt fight.' "

The power of the Raj is usually embodied in the Rajah. Five or six Rajahs have come with the English army. They stay a month or two, return to India successively, and then come back again, so that two or three of them are always with the Staff. They live, moreover, without pomp or show, having indeed, only one or two aides-de-camp. I was told about the Rajah of Jodhpur, a very old man. He is not the reigning prince, but his uncle, and possesses the greatest prestige. I remembered how Chevrillon has told us that these sovereigns of Jodhpur trace back their pedigree through a hundred and thirty-nine generations to the Sun, who was the grandfather of Rama.

## Introduction

One of the Generals refused to let me become too imaginative. He brought back these mythical heroes to our own level.

“Yes,” he told me, “in old days these Sikhs were a caste of warriors. They equipped themselves at their own expense and had no occupation beyond fighting. But to-day, in India, everywhere the sword is yielding to the pen and the plough. These fine horsemen send their pay to their families to buy land which they will cultivate when they go home.”

Next day I visited a camp hospital, where the Indians are tended (most admirably) under a tent. I was given an opportunity of talking to a Sikh officer. In a fighting unit there are seventeen native officers to thirteen English.

My interlocutor was an Indian with an abundance of decorations, who had been wounded in circumstances that brought him great distinction. He had a splendid face, expressive of loyalty. With his woollen jersey and his portly figure he looked like one of our sturdy village blacksmiths, and I said to myself that

## Our Indians at Marseilles

these strangers from a distant land who astound us by standing shoulder to shoulder with us in the defence of French soil, are very closely akin to ourselves. They like to be with our peasants and talk to them by signs, and I have seen a child teaching them French on the Berlitz method. As he peeled a potato he said, "knife, potato," and the others set themselves to repeat the two words.

## PROLOGUE

A HAPPY chance made me a witness of a most extraordinary event in this great war, full as it is of the unexpected—the arrival of the Indian Expeditionary Force at Marseilles.

The city was decked with flags as if it were one of the great national holidays. From the Cannebière to the Prado was just a sea billowing with a crowd of many colours, all in holiday attire, with little flags of the Allies in button-hole or dress, shouting welcome to the gallant, bronze-faced soldiers who marched by with dignified yet swinging gait, and smiled with a flash of dazzling teeth when people threw them flowers and children gave them flags. It was a delirious scene. People who were drinking in the cafés of the Cannebière, men, women, officers,

## Our Indians at Marseilles

stood up on their chairs and shouted, "*Vive Angleterre !*" "*Vivent les Hindous !*" "*Vivent les Alliés !*"

The weather was glorious. Not the tiniest cloud stained the brilliant blue of the southern sky. The strange sound of the Indian pipes, in sound and form so like our Cossacks' *zournas*, made the crystal air thrill with their silvery notes. But my gift of drawing and the really touching kindness of the local staff authorities, enabled me to follow the Indians right into their camps, to watch then and note all their characteristics, while I drew anything and everything that particularly struck me.

The memories I brought back from their camp are so many and so various that I had to jot down these hurried notes in order to fix impressions which have struck me more than anything else in my life. I should never have made up my mind to lay these hurried, incoherent notes before the eyes of the general reader, had it not been that various details observed from life awakened my interest, so that whoever is interested in these

## Prologue .

mysterious soldiers may possibly be not averse to hear about them.

My kind readers must not look for style nor form in this journal, which is just jotted down as memory serves : if I have succeeded in giving in some slight degree the impression of the camp, and if my notes can offer some interest to the admirers of these gallant Sepoys, I shall be more than happy.

Whether I have succeeded, dear readers, you must judge. '



# SKETCHES AND IMPRESSIONS OF THE INDIAN CAMP AT MARSEILLES

*September—October, 1914*

## I

### PARC BORÉLY

AT last I have obtained the necessary permit, and I can begin work to-day. As soon as I had passed the entrance of the Parc Borély it was as if I had been transported by a wave of a magician's wand into a world utterly detached from the present. Good Heavens, what variety everywhere and in everything! I arrived in the midst of the turmoil of pitching camp. All over the great race-course there was nothing but soldiers, carts, empty wagons, a few tents already pitched; and all this chaos with an accompaniment of shouts and orders and braying mules made up a scene so unexpected, so out of the



PREPARING THE MID-DAY MEAL.



## Parc Borély

common in our days, that for a moment I stopped involuntarily, in breathless astonishment, feasting my eyes on the truly incomparable vista. Before me, a little to the right of the race-course, rose a little hillock, crowned with a white château. This picturesque château stood out sharply against the blue background of the mountains, whose curved and billowing outlines closed in the back of the picture. The evening sun bathed the whole view with its rays of golden pink, and the thin, aromatic mist, which was beginning to rise, seemed to be woven of gold and purple by the hands of a fairy, as light as air.

The arrival of an English officer roused me from my dreams. "You want to draw something here, Mademoiselle?" he asked me with a strong accent. I said, "Yes," and he led me into the Sikhs' camp.

Seldom, save for the Cossacks, have I seen such fine men. There was not one less than some five feet eleven in height, slender, beautifully proportioned, while many are of real beauty. Their expression is gentle and remarkably sympathetic,

## Our Indians at Marseilles

especially when, as so often happens, a kindly smile lights up their bronze faces. But what can it be round their chins? I look closer and see their beards carefully twisted up and held in place by a thin string of black silk which they fasten behind their ears. What a funny idea to roll up the beard like this, when it would have been so simple to cut it off! I asked a French interpreter about this, and he told me that no Sikh has the right to cut off a single one of his hairs from the day he is born.

“You will also notice, Mademoiselle, the iron ring which they have on their turban. It is the distinctive mark of their caste, which is forged from a dreadful weapon of old times, and is given them by the Guru or High Priest . . . This is the special warrior caste.” I think, too, they have the right of eating any kind of meat, while all the other Indians are only allowed to eat goats.

If I looked at them with natural curiosity they repaid me in kind. From the moment of my appearance in their camp a great many of them stopped their work and crowded round,



THE 63RD MANCHESTERS.



## Parc Borély

looking at me like a strange animal. What must they have thought to see me there! But the first touch of the pencil in my sketch-book was the signal for a whole assembly to crowd round me several rows deep. Here was something very extraordinary for these soldiers from a distant land.

What good, honest faces there were on every side! How amused and happy, and indeed proud they were to be sketched! How merrily eager they were to pose before me, stiff, motionless, their arms glued to their sides! Poor fellows, they had no idea how unpicturesque an attitude this is. I sketched them all the same; I was so pleased with their enjoyment.

Bless me! what jolly laughter, and remarks and exclamations broke out behind me as soon as I had made my models like. It was really strange and funny to see these wild, rough soldiers, who seemed to have come to life again from the depths of bygone ages, as merry as children and all on account of a simple little sketch. The drawing done, my models absolutely insisted on signing

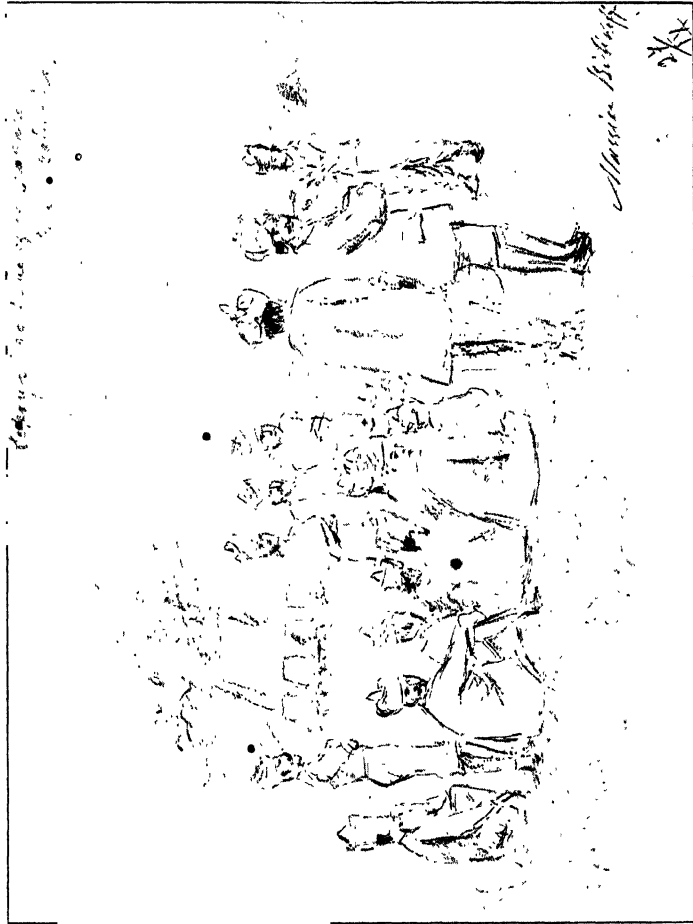


## Our Indians at Marseilles

their names, and so I got a score of signatures in Hindustani which some day will surely be of historic interest.

All at once some English officers came upon my audience and sent them back post-haste to their neglected work. They then came up to me and I showed them my sketches. They complimented me and one of them brought up a Pathan officer of the 57th Rifles, a fine fellow, and suggested that I should draw him. I sketched him quickly, together with a Pathan Sepoy, and both signed their names for me. These are quite different from the Sikhs. Coming from the high mountain districts of the Punjab, close to Afghanistan, they have delicate or<sup>1</sup> rather, sharp features; in figure they are slighter and thinner than the Sikhs, who are much broader built.

The Pathans are one of the castes of the Punjab, which lies at the base of the Himalayan foot-hills—"the land of the Seven Castes"—and are Mahommedans in religion. Their complexion is much darker than that of the Sikhs,



THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT'S 129TH BALUCHIS.



## Parc Borély

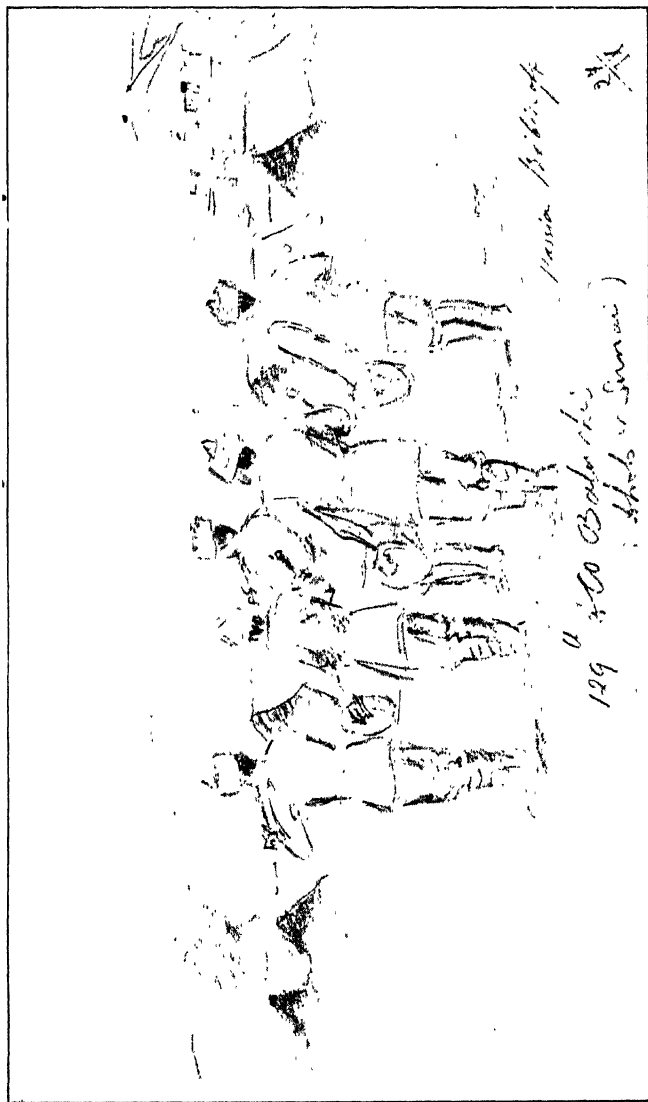
and their expression is grim and tense. They are matchless shots, and their catlike litheness enables them to creep like wild beasts over any sort of ground and surprise the enemy. But it is growing late; the sun will soon plunge into the limpid waves of the sea and the mountains change from golden rose to the most delicate mauve, which in turn will soon fade into a dark violet. The sacred hour of prayer has come, and no stranger's look must profane this solemn moment which belongs to the Faithful alone.

A day later and the camp is unrecognisable. It has none of yesterday's chaotic aspect. The whole space is dotted with tents of dazzling white; the lines of forage and munitions are set out in perfect order. Here and there rise eddies of bluish smoke, with a acrid smell that grips me by the throat. That is the Hindus preparing their mid-day meal. The sight of this cooking is so picturesque that I stop to watch it. On a little square space framed with bags and carts and mules, stands a fireplace built of a few

## Our Indians at Marseilles

bricks ; some logs thrown into the centre opening, crackle and throw out volleys of sparks. A big black kettle is set over the fire, and from under its half-open lid escapes a thick yellowish steam. Round about are scattered little flat white plates, bowls of every shape, and tins ; while a group of Hindus round about is busy turning and patting little white flat cakes with their hand. These they make with astounding speed.

What a group ! It deserves a master's pencil. The most fertile imagination could not conceive such a picture. One is bare to the waist with a sort of white skirt draped round him, quite in the fashion ; another in a grey jersey such as cyclists wear, with trousers cut short to the knee, and on his head a scarlet turban ; yonder is a Sikh, engaged in taking down his long hair, like a woman, and then rolling it up again in a little chignon on the top of his head. They are all squatting or lying down in the strangest and most diversified attitudes. They are so slender, so thin, so supple that they can literally bend in two. Their knees almost touch their chin.



THE PIPERS OF THE 129TH BALUCHIS.



## Parc Borély

Having feasted my eyes on this picture, I go on, and in taking a short cut, pass quite close to a group eating dinner. Anxious looks are fixed upon me, and what do I see? They have thrown away the flat cakes that they were just going to eat! As I learnt afterwards, they consider their food defiled if a person of alien religion passes too near and his shadow falls upon it!

On my way I drew a charming little group of English of the 63rd Manchester Regiment, and then went towards a regiment camped opposite the Grand Stand. It was the Duke of Connaught's 129th Regiment of Baluchis. They wear a turban like the Pathans' with the point in the middle, and in type they are very like the latter. The Baluchis, who are Mahommedans, come, as indeed their name signifies, from the frontiers of Baluchistan and are of Arab descent. But I am told that though they bear the name of Baluchi, the regiment hardly contains any men of pure Baluchi descent. How is this? It is because they will not serve as soldiers save under the orders of the chief of their caste and tribe. Thus all the





SHIVERING IN THE MISTRAL.

## Parc Borély

Baluchi regiments are composed of warlike tribes from the northern frontiers of India. They are fine types, with delicate aquiline noses, very tall, very slight, and exceedingly warlike.

Seeing the whole camp was resting, I went up to an officers' tent to ask what I could find interesting to draw. Thereupon an officer called up a native lieutenant, dressed all in white, and a white turban with a puggaree hanging down to his waist. A European waistcoat was terribly out of keeping with his costume. I had my paint box to-day, and I made a quick *pochade* of him. During the afternoon the camp came to life again. I walked about looking for the picturesque and espied a whole crowd of Baluchis sitting in a big circle. What was going on? They told me that something about the war was being read to them. That lasted a good while, and I had time to sketch them all. Before leaving the camp I also made a sketch of the musicians with their pipes which, as I said before, in sound and form are so like our Cossacks' *zournas*.

Next morning the mistral was blowing furiously

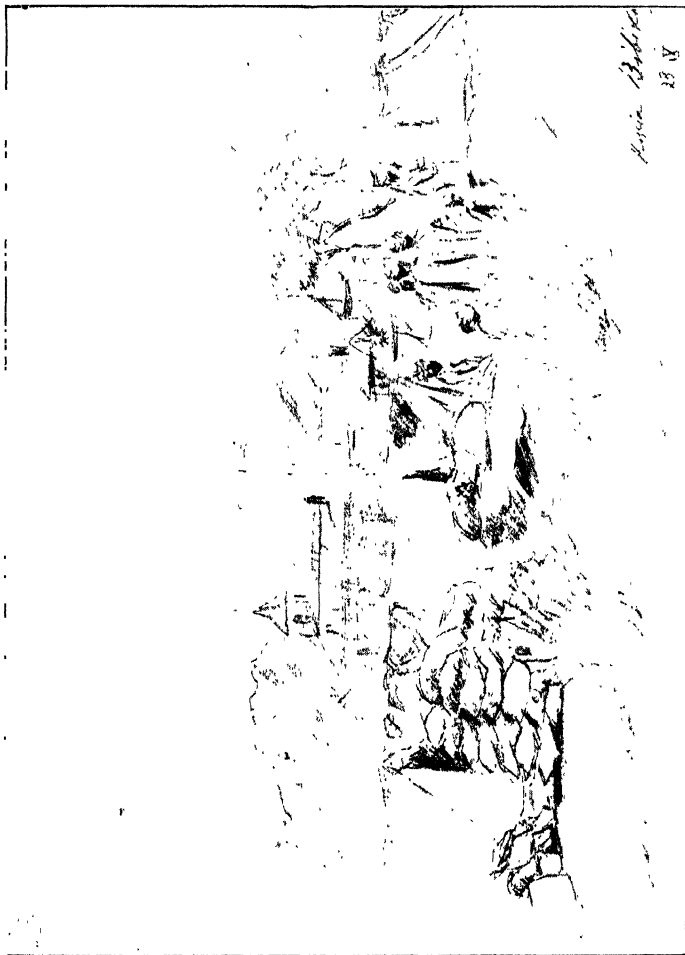
## Our Indians at Marseilles

and I could not do anything much except a sketch of Indians wrapped up in their blankets, which from a distance make them look like mummies. They could not keep warm, poor fellows, in this mistral whose fierce, cold blast goes right through you.

In an exposed spot it becomes intolerable. It literally blows you away, and I had to take shelter under some bushes and tamarisks, where I made a sketch of Indians eating. Two officers came up and asked me for my permit. Seeing my Russian name the face of the younger lit up. He said he had been in Russia and was very fond of my country and he went on to ask us, Mother and myself, to take a cup of tea in his tent.

As soon as I am with English officers I cannot fail to perceive their courtesy and kindness towards me, a gracious memory which I shall keep for ever.

But what an odd aftertaste the tea had! Afterwards I found out that we had goats' milk with it, for the Hindus are not allowed to touch any meat or milk but theirs, and this is



THE MESS-HOUSE.



## Parc Borély

why the troops are always followed by a herd of goats.

The following day there was nothing very striking. I sketched two types of the 59th Sikhs, and they signed their names in Hindustani; then, in the 57th Sikhs, I sketched a whole mass of artillery wagons with the sentry beside them. He was so delighted to stand for me !

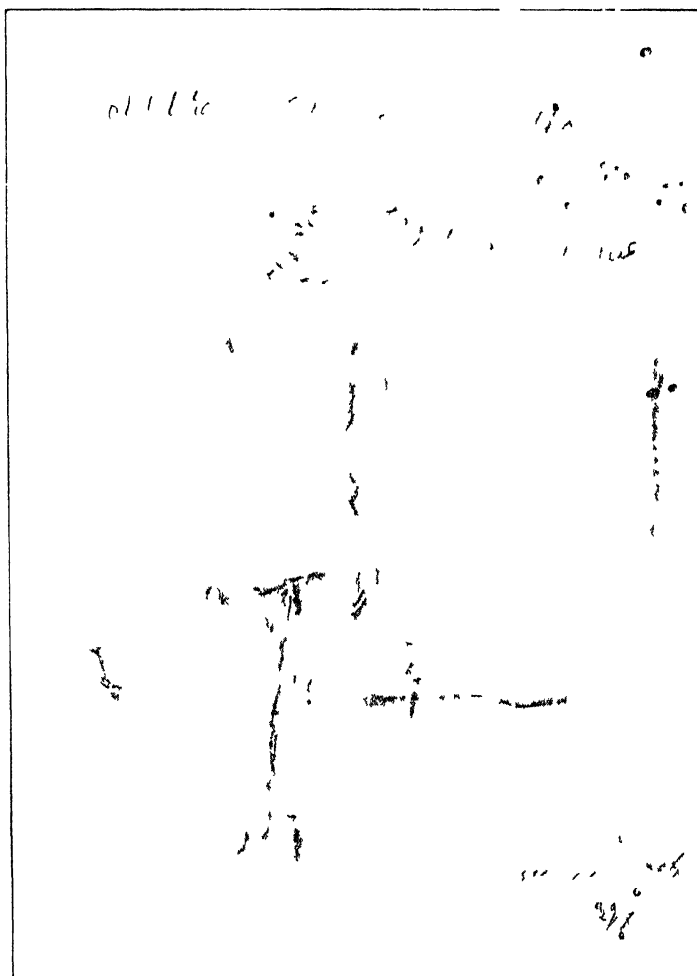
If the last two days were not very productive, to-day—the last of September—has been very different. I really have to put force upon myself not to be carried away by the flood of recollections. Such a host of impressions, of queer little events ; such movement and variety. Sikhs, Pathans, Baluchis, a perfect swarm of tents all dazzling white, mulecarts, bags, boxes of every imaginable size, a row of immense barrels full of water for the troops, continual movement to and fro, an unceasing buzz of thousands of voices, eddies of blue smoke veiling all this human hive with a veil of invisible gauze—all these recollections rush in upon me, swift, impetuous, alluring ;



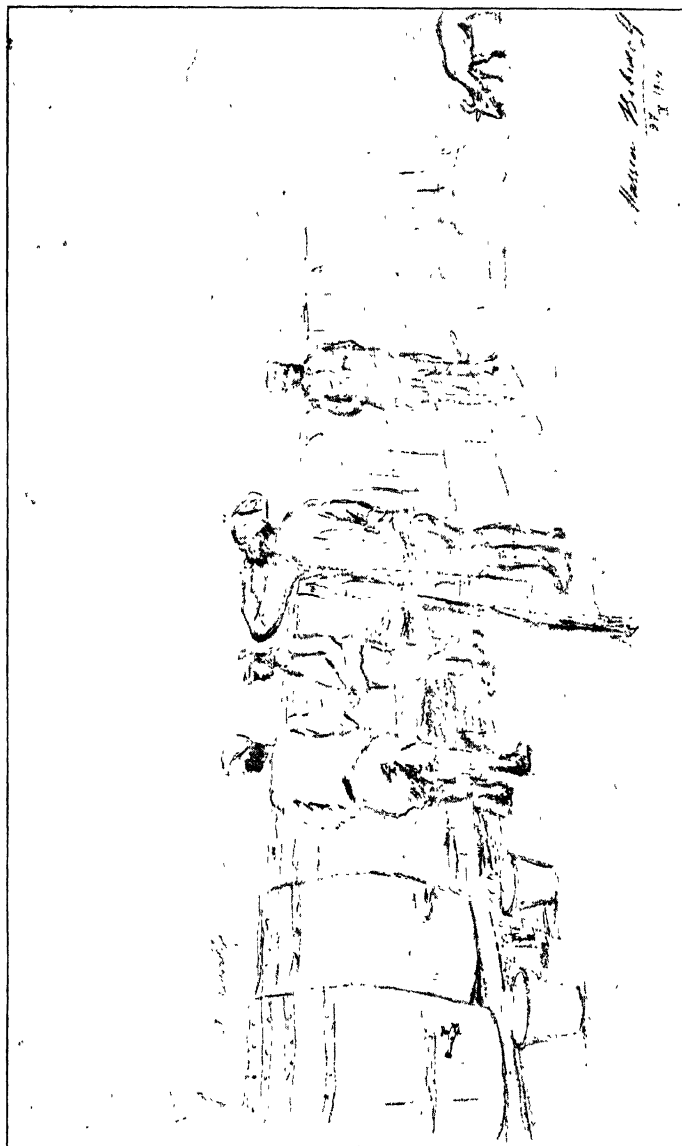
## Parc Borély

such a torrent bursting every barrier that I have to make a tremendous effort not to be submerged by its swelling waves. But I am getting lyrical, and in this style one could write whole volumes, which takes me right away from my object. Let me stick to plain facts ! As I entered the camp to-day I made up my mind to see something new. The idea came to me : suppose I drew a Hindu Priest ? I had no doubt there were some in the camp. I made inquiry of the first officer I met, and he offered me a place in his motor, and so we went all round the camp. On the way he told me one must not even think of drawing the priests, as they consider it most unlucky to have their portrait taken ; but at the officer's advice we stopped opposite the 15th Sikhs, one of the finest of all the contingent. The regiment was going away in an hour and a half. Really, with all one's wish to believe one could not have told it. Before their tent, round a folding table covered with maps, the officers were sitting, calm and unruffled, pipe in mouth, the men, squatting under their tents, were cleaning their rifles and





ANOTHER OF THE 59TH SIKHS

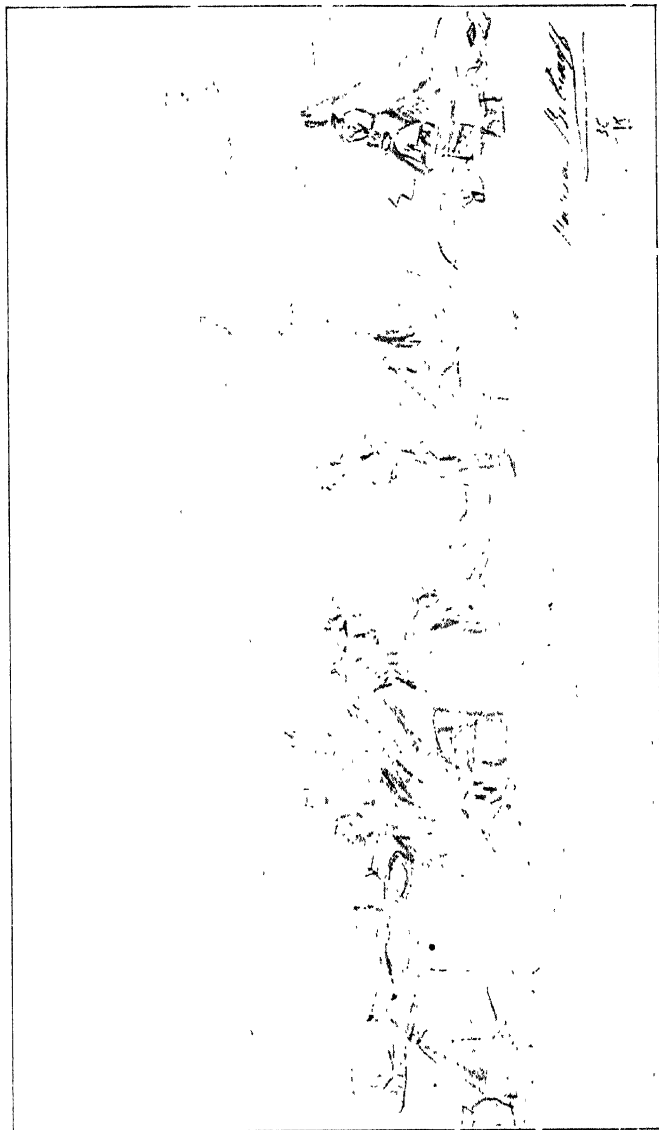


WATER BARRELS.



## Parc Borély

equipment. I was sketching a group of this sort when a young officer came up to me, looked at it and asked me in the name of the officers of the regiment to make a sketch like that for their Mess. This was very flattering, and I set to work, and brought it to the officers with a little dedication. Could I ever have imagined that my work would appear one day in the Officers' Mess of an Indian Regiment? I made another hasty sketch of a fine Sikh; then I sat down on the grass to lunch, in the middle of a great ring of sepoys who looked on me as a curiosity. But the hour of departure drew near, and not a single tent was struck. An order—and all the men get to work. All preparations are carried out with wonderful quiet and regularity. What splendid organisers these English are! In the space of half an hour the whole camping-ground was covered with tents rolled up, and baggage and piled arms. Short, gutturai orders from the native sergeants—and the men began to fall in. The whole regiment formed up, and the baggage was swiftly hoisted on to the mule carts, which started off one by one, and



Mar 10, 1918

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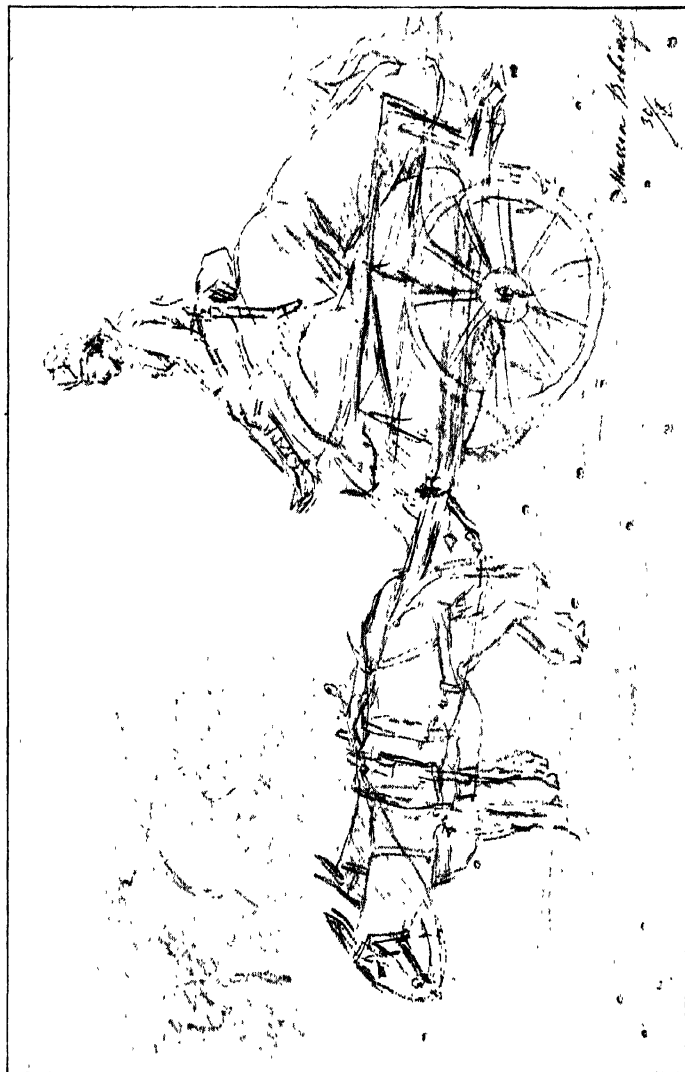
AWAITING ORDERS FOR DEPARTURE.

## Parc Borély

halted to let the regiment pass, afterwards drawing up in the rear. I hurried up to one of them and sketched it rapidly. It was a most curious turnout ; a few flat iron bars laid across an axle with two wheels, and rails at each side. The pole had just been fastened to an iron yoke which was put across two mules and fastened to their stout saddles. These are ill-tempered and unruly animals and it needs the strength and skill and patience of an Indian to make them go straight.

The regiment is off. I waved a last farewell to the officers ; the men as they went by looked at me with a good-natured smile that showed their flashing teeth, and something in their dignified and easy swing, and in their honest faces, is surprisingly like our Cossacks. And all at once as I saw the last carts passing out of sight my heart was filled with regret. . . . The others, also, are to start at dawn.

The fact is I have lost my heart to these proud and gallant bronze-skinned soldiers, little though I have been amongst them. I like them for all these new and varied impressions which



MULE CART.



FRENCH INTERPRETERS.





## Parc Borély

transported me day after day into the country of Sindbad the Sailor. I forgot. Do we not live in a time when we actually see everything that only happened in the marvellous tales of Jules Verne? . .

Afterwards I made sketches everywhere; the corner of the English camp, a little view of tents with two French Interpreters sitting before one of them. One of the men had a bunch of grapes in his hand and recommended it specially to my notice as being fine to "croquer." \* Finally a group of three Indians before their tents, one of whom is smoking a long pipe such as the Arabs use in smoking their narghilé.

By this time the sun was sinking to the horizon, and after casting my eyes for the last time round the vast camp, and bidding farewell in my heart to these splendid soldiers, I made my way home.

\* Croquer means to bite up as well as to sketch, so that the point of the jest was very much as if an English soldier had held up a bottle with a corkscrew, as a capital thing to draw.



A GROUP OF SEPOYS.

## II

### THE CAMP OF LA PEUNE

DESPITE the depth, variety, and colour of my first impressions of the Indians, they were nothing by the side of those which I am now going to describe. These impressions are so many, so swift, so alluring that I hesitated long before letting my inexperienced pen undertake to describe them. But at the same time the clearness and strength with which all this has fixed itself in my memory gives me the hope of being able to sketch it firmly in outline, while my enthusiastic admiration will endeavour to add some colour which I hope is not too pale.

The second part of the first contingent of the Indian troops was settled at various camps in the neighbourhood of Marseilles. There were four camps set apart for them; the camps of



THE CAMP OF LA FEUNE.

## The Camp of La Peune

La Barasse, of La Valentine, of St. Marcel, and La Peune. I visited them all. La Barasse had no message for me. It was beside a dusty high-road at the foot of a fairly high mountain—it filled me with a sense of oppression. When I looked round it seemed that there was not space enough. Carts and wagons and trams continually passing along the high-road worried me and checked the course of my inspiration. Moreover, here I came again on the infantry which I had just been drawing at Parc Borély, as well as the reserve and ammunition columns which did not interest me so much—in short it was not to my liking.

From there I went on to visit La Valentine. The situation was charming. It spread out at the foot of a pretty wooded hill and lay in a glorious forest on the banks of a little river which wound away into the distance. Unfortunately it was so difficult to get at that I could not make choice of it. From there, rather heavy at heart, I made my way to St. Marcel. This camp was one of the smallest. It was on the same level as

## Our Indians at Marseilles

La Barasse. Shut in by high old crumbling walls, it seemed to me as if I could not breathe. With some misgiving and heavy at heart I went on to La Peune, the last camp left for me to visit. What would it be like? I knew beforehand that I should find the cavalry and the artillery there. It remained to learn what its situation would be. It takes an artist to understand how greatly a fine situation can influence one's inspiration. It is that which makes the frame of our picture.

With a tremor of excitement I took the tram and went off to La Peune. At the end of a quarter of an hour's going along a lovely road the tram stopped opposite a cottage. I was plunged deep in dreams when the voice of the conductor called me back to reality. "La Peune!" Instantly I picked up my bag, and, jumping out of the tram, found myself facing a nice old peasant woman in a white cap with a bucket in her hand. I asked her how to get into the camp. She looked at me with some little astonishment, and said, "The English are very strict, young lady! No one can go in."

## The Camp of La Peune

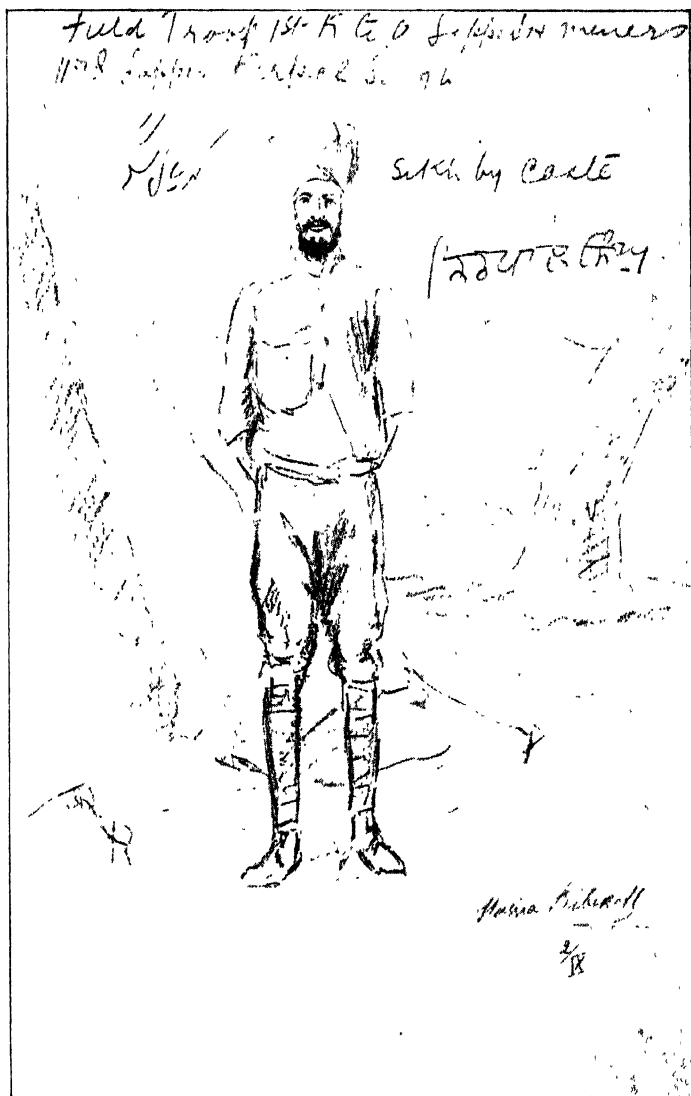
Then I told her I had an authorisation from the General Staff and I was only asking her to show me the shortest way. As she showed me the way she said to me, "You must come from a foreign country, my daughter. Where do you come from?"

"I am a Russian, my friend," said I. "I come from far away—from the land of snow and Cossacks."

"Ah, my dear young lady, is it possible? Fine fellows, the Cossacks, aren't they? Oh, my daughter, let me embrace you. That would make me so happy." She took me by the shoulders and kissed me on both cheeks. These heart-felt words, this outburst and simple sincerity on the part of the dear old peasant woman moved me to tears.

To reach the camp we had to go up a wide and winding path which ended in a pine wood. When I reached the top and looked round I almost shouted with delight. Before me in an undulating valley were scattered a multitude of white tents and lines of picketed horses. The background of the landscape was a splendid viaduct whose





KIRPAL SINGH.

## The Camp of La Peune

whiteness stood out sharply against the fir wood which swept up a high ridge of blue mountains. To the left, upon a level with the point where I stood, I looked over a wide view of some thirty miles where fields and valleys of tender green melted far away into a mountain ridge and vanished in a thin lilac mist. Through the pine wood a winding footpath takes you to the little village church, with a graveyard behind, where the tombstones and marbles with silver crosses on them glittered in the bright sun of the south. The weather was splendid and in this crisp air and crystalline atmosphere everything stands out with wonderful clearness.

What a change on the right ! As soon as one is past the Anglo-Indian post at the entrance of the camp an entirely different picture meets one's eye. Beneath the wall of a country farm sellers of beer and cakes and fruit have set up their stalls which are visited by a large *clientèle* of English and Indian soldiers, and there most laughable explanations in Franco-Anglo-Indian are to be heard. From the farm terrace come

## Our Indians at Marseilles

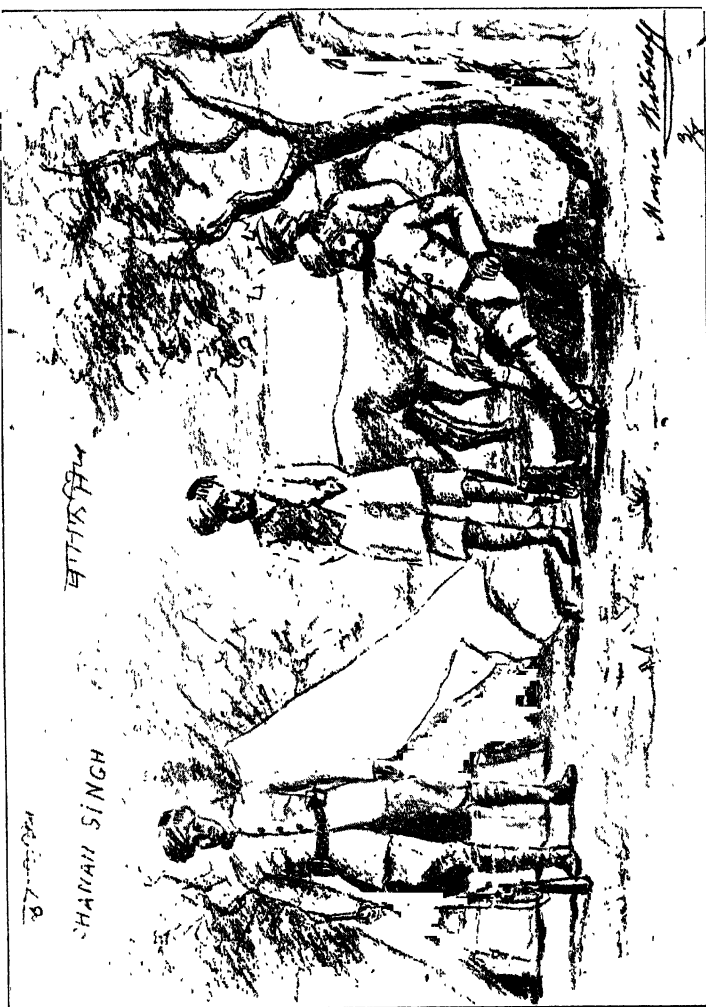
bursts of laughter and jokes from a crowd of English soldiers whose honest faces lean over to look at me. I take the road which leads me straight to the camp and cuts it, so to say, in two. To the left, on the little plain facing the viaduct, dotted with olive trees, stands the camp of the sappers, miners, and horse artillery. On the right are drawn up the wagons and limbers. Behind them, on the skirts of a little wood, stand several tents of the Indian Red Cross.

I make my way to the left. Some are rubbing down their horses, others unpacking the tents; men are washing and getting ready. I make a sketch of the horses being rubbed down, another of a fine Sikh. These are different from the first ones I saw. They have not their beards tied up, and their features are longer and sharper, with none of the rounded features of the former. Everything changes so quickly in this camp which is being pitched that I put away my sketching block and try a *pochade* in colour from a most beautiful point of view. I was just going away when a picturesque group of men cooking made me

## The Camp of La Peune

stop, and after sketching them I left the camp, for the October days are short and dusk falls quickly.

The next was a much fuller and more interesting day for me. I sketched a bit here and a bit there; a sentry beside the ammunition boxes, with two other sepoy who absolutely insisted on being included in the picture; then a Sikh with his chignon; a line of baggage unpacked before a tent with an open umbrella to boot. A crowd of sunburnt spectators gathered round as usual. When I had finished I was going off, when suddenly I was made to stop by signs and unintelligible words. All the curious crowd gesticulated and talked to me, asking something in Hindustani. Fancy how much I understood! At last one who knew a little English said to me, "Give me my sketch, give me my sketch." The others, delighted that I was able to understand, gesticulated more than ever in an outburst of joy, and eager hands were stretched out for my sketch-book. I was quite alone, not an officer was near. In serious anxiety for my safety I tore out a couple



187-10-10

SHANAN SINGH

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Shanana Singh

34

Shanana



Marvin K. Liebowitz  
2/2 1974

BAGGAGE UNPACKED.

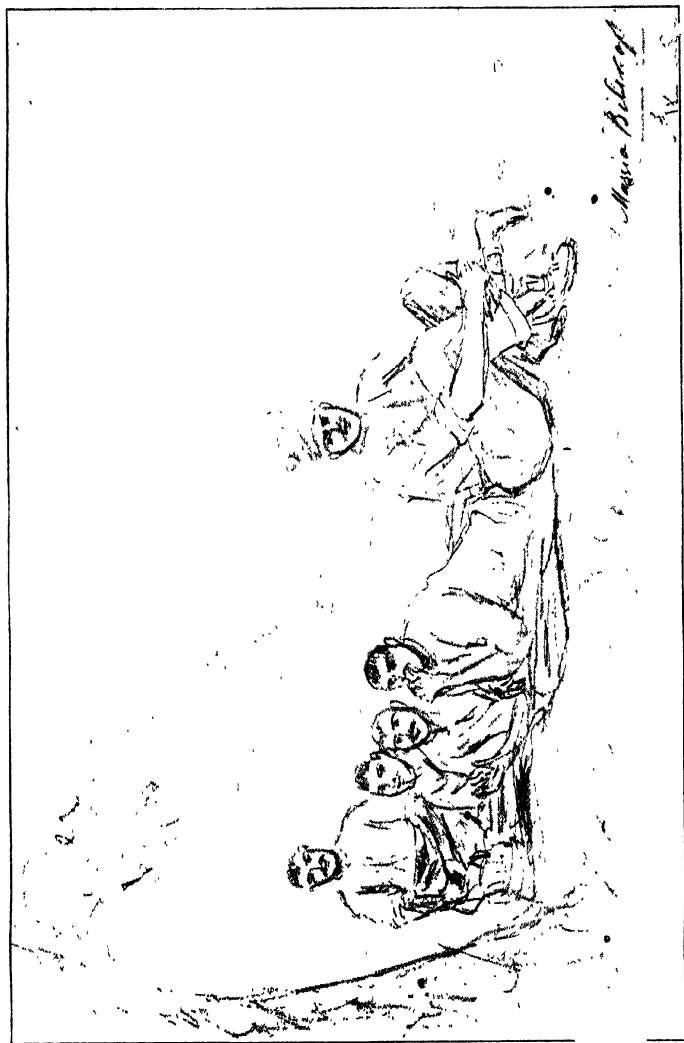


## The Camp of La Peune

of pencil sketches and gave them these. Delight of the sepoys! They passed them from hand to hand, making remarks and laughing and recognising themselves. Now this was very much to their liking, and others promptly began to pose before me when a native sergeant came up. "Arriah-hé! arriah-hé!" (Go away!) he shouted, and my audience gradually dispersed. I went a little further. What is that group yonder? I came up. It was a dense semicircle gathered round some smokers squatting in the midst. They had the same long pipe that I had already seen and each took a pull in turn, making a queer noise like the noise of blowing down a tube into water. As soon as I opened my sketch-book they stood perfectly still and watched me smilingly, their bronzed faces as it were lit up by the dazzling whiteness of their teeth. I showed them my sketch. Delight! They showed it to each other, recognised the likenesses, but the thing that amused them most was the pipe.

I made a few more sketches, some here, some there. Saddlers mending saddles in the shade





A GROUP OF SEPOYS.



THE HUBBLE-BUBBLE.



## The Camp of La Peune

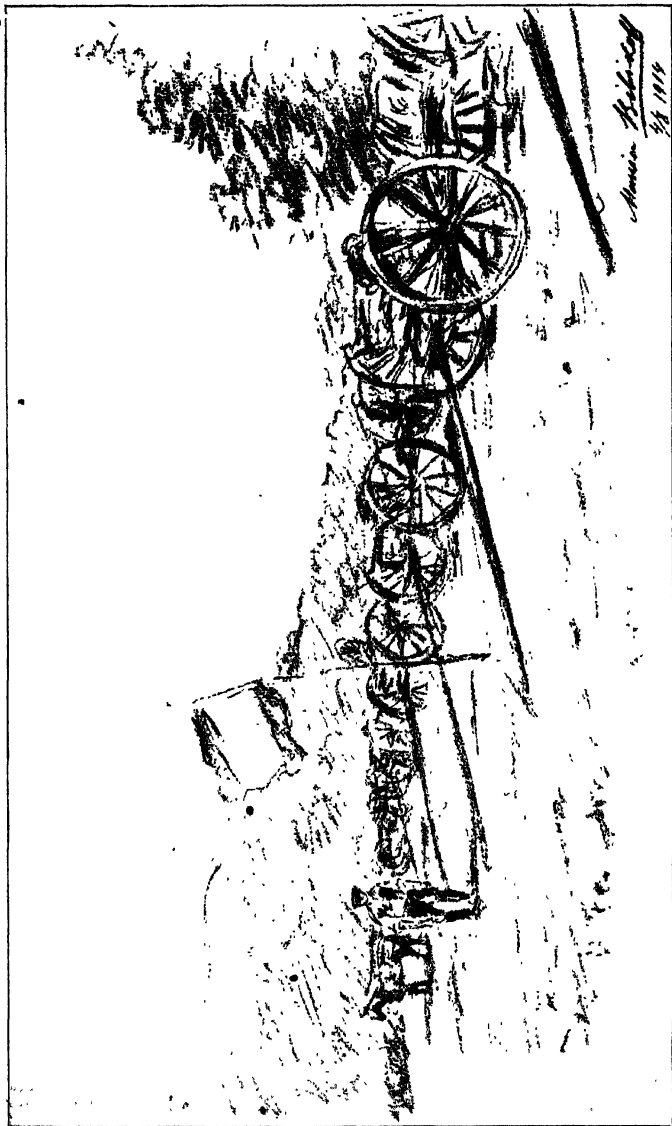
of the fig trees and olives ; cooks of a different type from all the Hindus I had seen so far ; their colour was a dark chestnut, almost black, and in face they were much more like negroes than the natives of Hindustan—thick lips, flat noses, high cheekbones—none of the refined and regular features of the sepoys. After that I did a little more sketching and left the camp, for it was getting late and the Corniche, where we live, is nearly twelve miles away.

On the 4th we heard by chance that troops were leaving La Peune that day at two o'clock. It was the artillery that was going. It ought to be a most interesting sight. We hurriedly took a taxi—a long open taxi, more like a private car—and tore through the air towards La Peune. We arrived amid fevered preparation. We made our way with difficulty among half a score of the wagons which were blocking all the camp, while the “Hué, hua !” of the drivers in their big straw hats and the cracking of long whips filled the whole plain. There was a long string of mule



Maxim Baskin  
38 1894

A LOADED WAGON.



Arthur B. B. B.  
24 1914

AN ARTILLERY PARK.

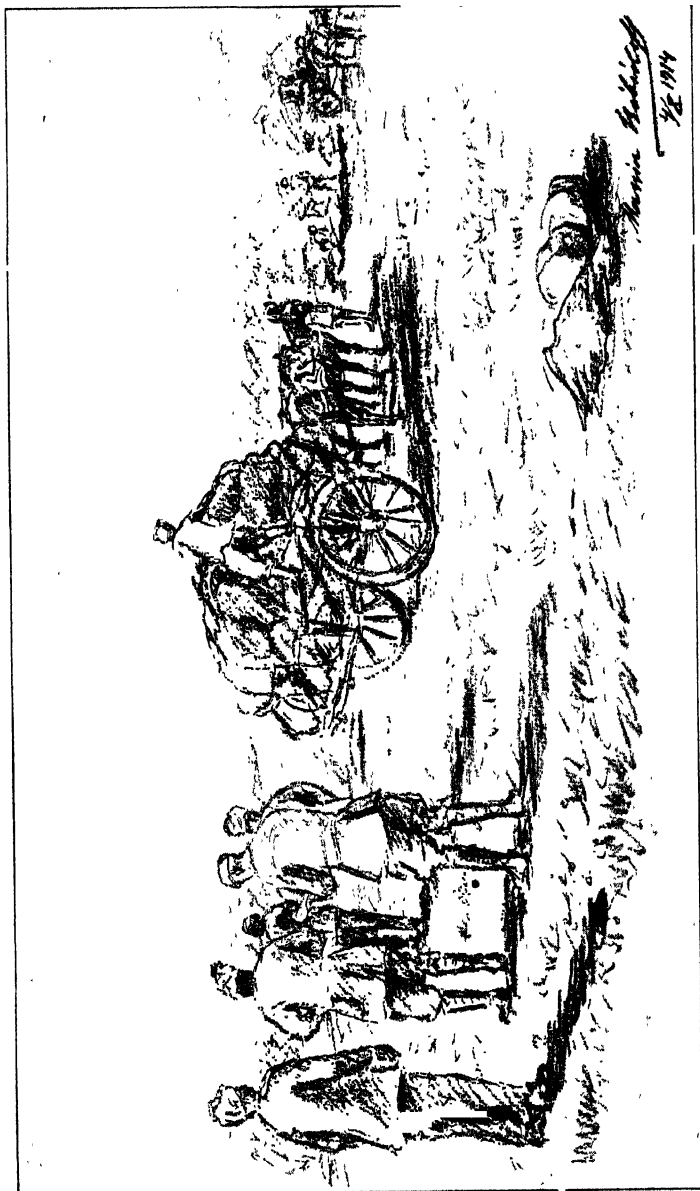


## The Camp of La Peune

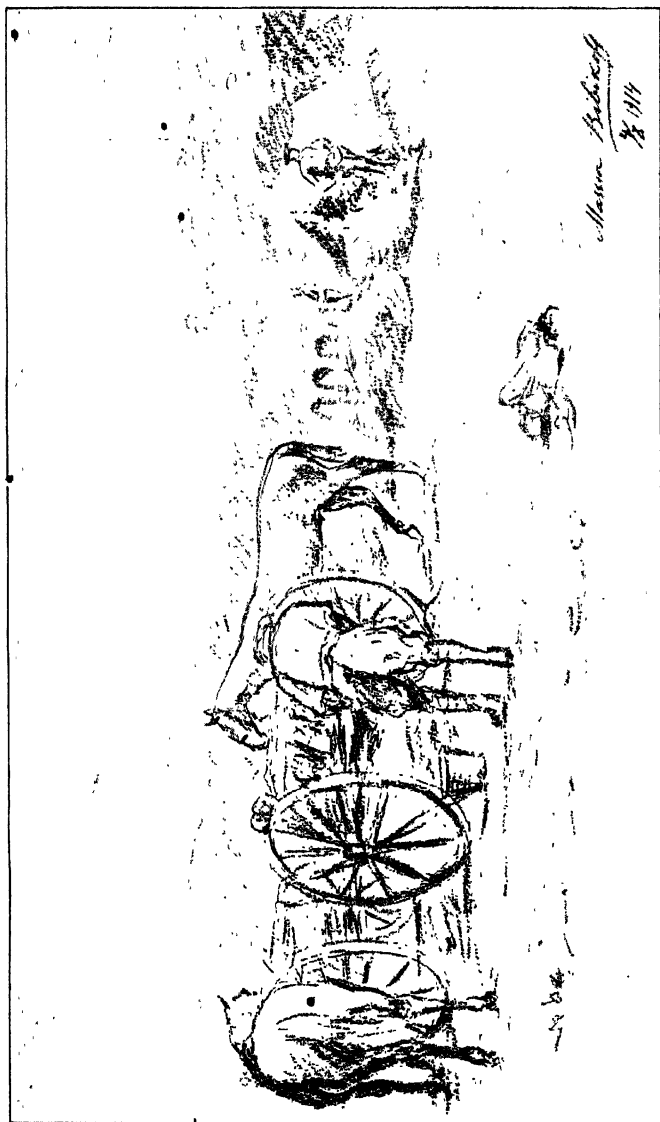
carts, moving along with the noise and rattle of metal. They jerked and bumped and almost upset on the deeply rutted road and the uneven ground of the camp. Here was a pair of mules who reared and ran away, raising a cloud of dust ; they galloped all round the camp and it was a miracle the cart was not overturned. When the dust dispersed the impassive " Kula " (driver) had already quieted them and there he was, lining up with his cart behind the wagons. Now one of the wagons was almost ready. A couple of sturdy Sepoys getting up behind were making all secure with ropes. That would keep them five minutes, time enough and to spare for making a sketch. I was giving the last touches when the wagon went off. The wheels sank deeply into the soft ground and the two heavy cart-horses had to make a tremendous effort to get it to stir. It was the same with a mule cart. Soon all the carts and wagons were ready and all filed off in the midst of a cloud of dust. •

Then they began harnessing the horses to the guns. I crossed the road and waited for the





MAKING A WAGON SECURE.



Mama B. B. B. B.  
X 114

WAITING TO BE HARNESSSED.



## The Camp of La Peune

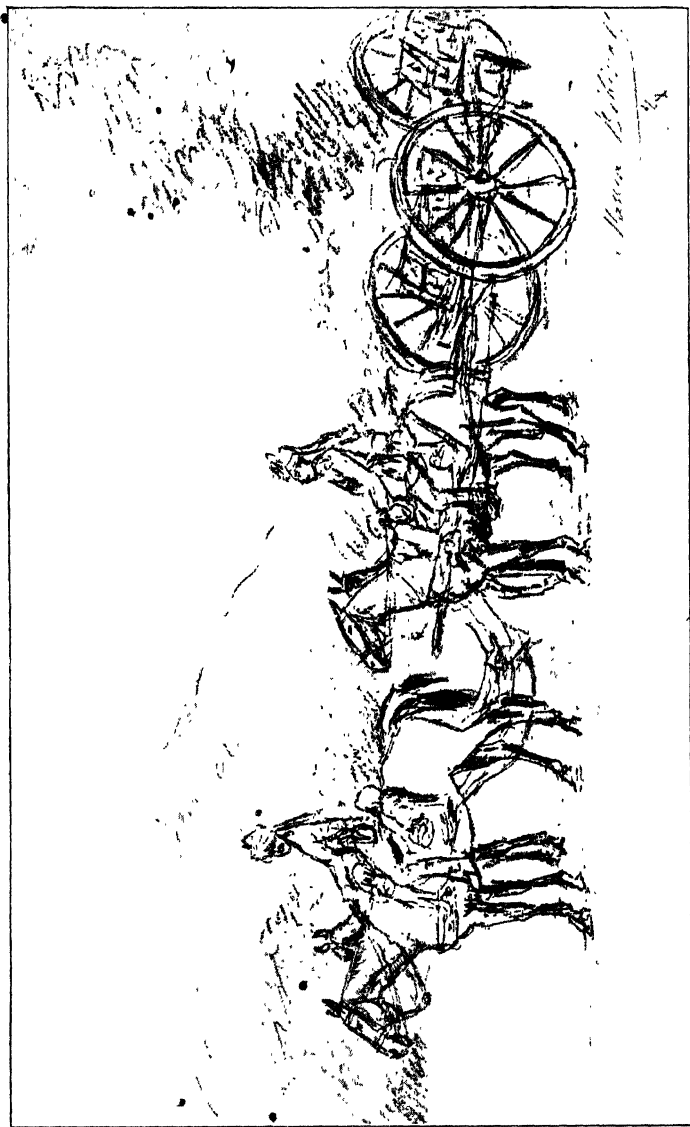
harnessing to be completed. Now the last driver is mounted, and they wait for the signal to start. The horses get impatient and pull at the traces. I hurriedly sketch this gun team and jump to one side to let it pass. Orders ring through the air and the long teams of six begin to move heavily; the sinewy, muscular horses rear and plunge. It looks as if they want to jump out of their harness, but the steady hand of their driver keeps them steadily on the march. The other guns also got under way and all the plain began to ring with the noise of artillery on the march and orders and cracking of whips and neighing of horses, until everything disappeared in a whirl of dust.

Heaven only knows how I was able to make sketches in all this turmoil. Everything happened so quickly, the scene changed so utterly that I still seemed to be in a dream when all was long past. When I woke from my trance and looked round, the whole camp was empty. The evening sun reddened the mountain tops and the forest at their foot put on violet tones. In the distance the



*Marion Bellamy*  
1896

A GUN TEAM.



READY.



## The Camp of La Peune

valleys began to be wrapped in a thin blue mist, only the church and the graveyard shone out like gilded marble in the amber rays of the setting sun.

My mother was at hand, her kodak in its case, and with one last look at this marvellous place I followed her mechanically.

This hurried vision was merely a little interlude before the arrival of the Indian Cavalry, and with it the arrival of beings whom I had only imagined in fairy stories—the Maharajahs. It is to them I wish to devote the greater part of my work, and the pages which follow should interest more than one who is eager for the extraordinary and unexpected.

A week and more passed, but at last the long-looked-for day came. From early morning as I took my usual walk along the Corniche I eagerly scanned the blue horizon to catch sight of the line of transports which were to bring me new models; and what models! We had been told that one

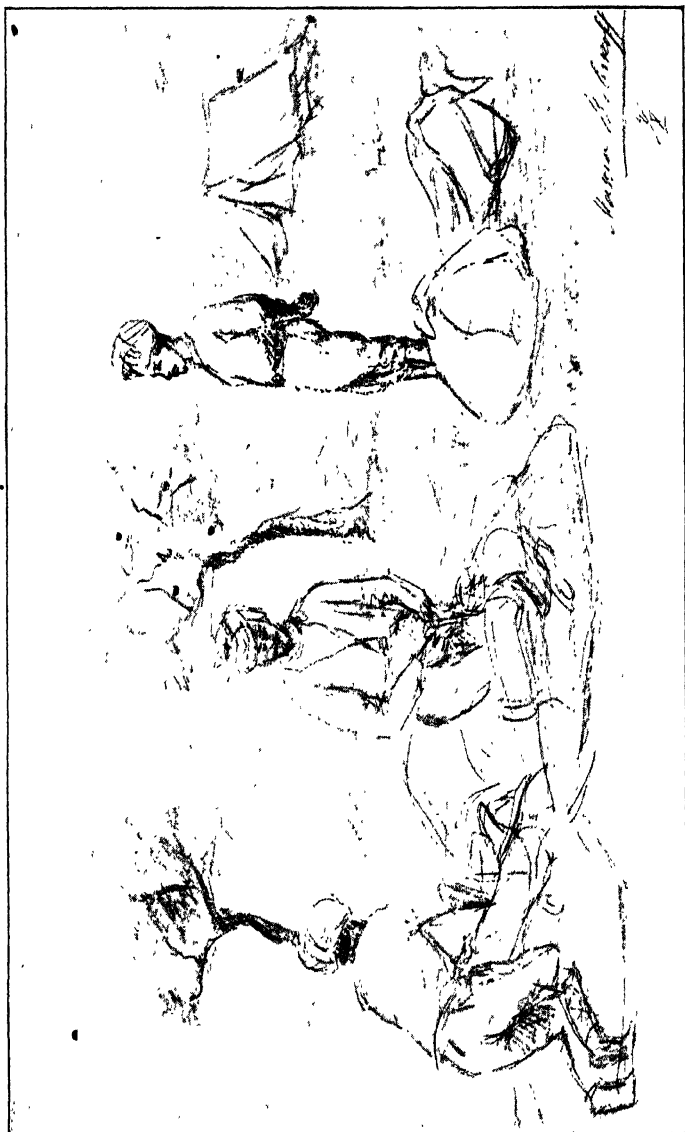


## Our Indians at Marseilles

regiment had nothing but Rajahs as officers, and that they were being transported to France by an aged Maharajah at his own expense.

All at once a thin trail of black smoke, a smudge in the morning mist, appeared over the blue waves. Soon a whole line of transports of the Messageries passed by like a naval squadron in a review, and leaving the Château d'If on their left, entered the port of Marseilles. . . . After all, I am not going to sit with my hands folded this afternoon. I am going to sniff the camp-smell again—a mixture of wood-smoke, new bread, leather and horse-sweat—the camp-smell which I have got so fond of.

Immediately after lunch we hurried off to La Peune. When we got into the camp we could not believe our eyes. Everything was in perfect order, as if the troops had been there a month already. What a wonderful sense of organisation the English have! Here are troops who arrived this very morning, weary with the fatigue of a six weeks' voyage, and within four hours everything is in its place and clean. The horses are



PACKING UP.



## The Camp of La Peune

rubbed down and the men are in new kit with not a single button missing from their uniform. This is the first thing that strikes every one who goes into an English camp for the first time.

My mother and I asked to be introduced to the Commander of this contingent. An officer brought us to Sir James Willcocks, Commander of the Indian Army, a tall, slight man, extremely young in appearance, who asked us what we wanted to do. Whereupon I showed him my sketches and the permit of the General Staff at Marseilles, asking him to let us visit the regiment of Rajahs. He smiled and said to me, "It is very difficult, Mademoiselle. This regiment belongs entirely to a Maharajah, and if he is not willing, even we English are powerless. But, come, I will introduce you to the Commander of the Regiment."

I followed him with a touch of anxiety. The fear of having access to the regiment barred, and the thought that the next moment I was to see a Maharajah made my heart beat fast. A Maharajah! . . . A magical name which seems to be





AN ORDERED CAMP.



## The Camp of La Peune

woven of fine pearls! A name which I never imagined except in an aureole of sparkling jewels! . . . I am going to see the being who thrilled my childish imagination, and appeared in my earliest dreams amid the flash of jewels that scintillated with every colour!

I kept discreetly apart while the General talked to a native officer, constantly raising his hand to his cap. I could not see the officer's face, for in side view it was almost entirely hidden by his thick turban. But he turned towards me—and it was like a gleam of sunlight. Never in my life had I seen a handsomer man. He realised the dreams of beauty in which I loved to wrap the heroes and princes of the Arabian Nights.

As he moved his head two diamonds which he wore in his ears darted out blue gleams, and a radiant smile lighting up his face disclosed dazzling teeth like a row of big pearls.

I stood motionless, with eyes for nothing but this splendid prince before me, when a sign from the General recalled me to reality. I came near. The General introduced me: "Mademoiselle,



## Our Indians at Marseilles

if you want to sketch in the reg<sup>l</sup>ment, speak to Maharajah Sher Singh, who will make everything easy for you."

With warm thanks to the General I went up to the Maharajah, who with a kindly gesture offered me his hand and gave me a few words of welcome. Then, with a wave of his hand, he showed me the whole camp, telling me I could draw what I liked in his regiment.

I lost no time in setting to work. Taking up my position on the edge of a little slope which ran along this side of the camp I got ready to sketch—but what? The whole camp was asleep. There was nothing but rows of white tents, lances stuck in the ground and tied up like sheaves, and rows of horses. All the men were in the tents. Obviously this was not very picturesque. Seeing my difficulty the Maharajah, who was talking behind me to the Native Colonel, and from time to time cast his eyes on my sketch-book, came up and asked if I would like to do something more interesting. I got up, and with the help of the few words of English I know, made him



*Maria Pollock*  
July 94

AN HOUR OF REST.



## The Camp of La Peune

understand that I should very much like to draw a man on horseback, if it were possible. Immediately he gave an order and four Indian officers, quite young, came up to him. It is wonderful how slight they were. The Hindus are slight enough, but never as yet had I seen any as slight as these. One especially struck me. I am sure he was not twenty. He was dressed in a sort of long coat with a row of yellow leather buttons, and on the collar were two golden eagles. For epaulettes he had a piece of silver chain mail with three Stars of India in gold upon them. Grey breeches, which went right down to his boots and were buttoned from ankle to knee, served as gaiters. What specially struck me about him was his astonishing likeness to King Alphonso XIII. Two brothers could not have been more alike. His small thin face was almost entirely hidden under his big solar topee, and it was only momentarily that I could catch sight of it. The other three were dressed in the same way.

Who were they? Could they be the young Rajahs? . . . A French interpreter came up to



THE YOUNG RAJAHS.

## The Camp of La Peune

me at this moment and I seized the opportunity to ask about these four young men. "They are, in fact, the four sons of the old Maharajah who brought his regiment to France at his own expense." Just then the "double of Alphonso XIII." gave an order and four horses were speedily saddled and brought up. The young Rajahs leapt lightly into the saddles and immediately cantered round in a big circle by the edge of the firwood at the foot of the mountain. The Maharajah, with a good-natured smile, invited me to sketch them as they were. Really I was overcome with so much kindness. Poor lads! They had not had time to breathe after their six weeks' voyage before they were made to get on horseback and caracole like this for a full half-hour. "Oh, Your Highness is very kind. I thank you very, very much," I said to Sher Singh, and ran off to sketch my cavaliers. I made all the haste I could. Still I had time to sketch them all. I thanked them warmly for their kindness, and what did I hear? It was they who thanked me for having sketched them!

## Our Indians at Marseilles

Afterwards I made a few more sketches. The Maharajah's camp-bed ; some types of the Jodhpur Lancers, the Indian Red Cross, and then as twilight fell we went away.

What bad luck ! All day long yesterday it rained incessantly. To-day there is a thin drizzle like a Scotch mist. All the same we plucked up courage, took our little lunch-basket and made our way to our dear Jodhpur Lancers. •

Ye gods, what mud ! We could hardly get on. At every step our goloshes went deep into the sticky mud and the English soldiers fished us out with a laugh. Lumps of clay stuck to our feet, and really a tortoise could have beaten our record for speed. At infinite risk of falling flat in this chocolate cream we skirted the farmyard wall, leaving the high-road on our left, and with a great sigh of relief set foot on the turf and made our way amid heaps of hay and munitions and bags and the tents of the Indian post-office, to the camp of " our " regiment. • • •

The rain had stopped, but heavy leaden



ENGLISH SOLDIERS.





## The Camp of La Peune

clouds covered the sky. Everything was dirty, muddy and dismal. The men, bespattered from head to foot, their heads and backs covered with empty sacks, went slowly to and fro carrying trusses of hay or small boxes of food for the camp. Opposite me was a little stone barrack, an outbuilding of the farm, which served as Officers' Mess, and the "boys" could dimly be seen in the darkness within setting the folding tables for lunch. I went down to the camp which was on flat ground below; as soon as I set foot on the ground it was even worse than at the entrance. It was just wet clay and so sticky that I had to struggle to pull each foot out of the gluey mess into which I sank ankle-deep. I could not help laughing, and the Indians who saw me in this plight joined in the laugh. At last I reached a little space on the bank under a row of trees which bordered the high-road separating the two camps. There, under a tent flap made of canvas, were seated two Indians preparing their flat cakes, between them a pile of little plates and bowls and pretty little copper cups full of water. A little further

## Our Indians at Marseilles

to the left near the bushes was a ring of Indians squatting with their backs to me. This is how they take their meal. No doubt these belong to a caste even stricter than the rest about eating. In fact they were so wrapped up in themselves that they looked as if they were performing some religious rite. Conversation was limited to a few words in an undertone. Under the tent flap my two Indians went on mechanically patting their flat white cakes. At this, their sacred hour, what thoughts possess these sons of the "Land of Marvels" ?

They passed to and fro incessantly like ants in an ant-heap, but the mechanical slowness of their movements, which seem rhythmically regulated, showed that their thoughts were far away from what they were doing. Their big, dreamy eyes, with their look of depth and intelligence, and full of Oriental languor, show that their inner life is much more real than their physical life. What do they see, these shining eyes, now veiled, now sparkling like glowing coals ? What mysteries and marvels open out



CASTE OBSERVANCE.



## The Camp of La Peune

before them? Or can it be that at this solemn moment, when all earthly thoughts ought to be banished, they contemplate the felicities of Nirvana, the ultimate dream of every Hindu?

Keeping at a distance, so as not to disturb them, I sketched this scene, and when I had finished, I glanced round the camp in search of a subject. I had made a few painful steps through the mud, when a very young lad stood in front of me and made signs for me to draw him. Poor fellow, how bespattered he was! But his face was attractive, and his eyes especially were splendid. I sketched him swiftly. He was dressed in a kind of short jacket of coarse wool and grey trousers that came half-way down his slender calves; barefoot, and with a little blue turban on his head. Another man also came up to be sketched. He was very tall and broad-shouldered, with long moustaches, and was wrapped in a long overcoat twice as big as himself, which came down almost to his ankles. I drew him on the same page beside the young man. If one had wanted to find a striking contrast, none

## Our Indians at Marseilles

better could have been found. After that I made my way towards the Mess, where we were to meet my mother, who had gone photographing on her own account. It was after twelve o'clock. We sat down for lunch on trusses of wet hay in attitudes very much like those of our models. On our left the bakers were at work baking bread, and the good smell of fresh bread came to sharpen our appetite. These ovens are most ingenious arrangements. They consist of three little heaps of earth beaten hard. The opening is in the middle, and on top of it is fixed a little cover which is kept shut while the bread is baking within. When it is ready, it is taken out with a long iron rod with a shovel head, and is set on a large leaf upon a square of iron laid in front of the oven. Some English soldiers came to carry off the good round loaves piping hot, and one of them, seeing us at lunch, offered us a loaf. How excellent that bread was! In five minutes we saw some jolly "Tommies" laden, one with a couple of folding chairs, another with a little table, and in the twinkling of an eye we were comfortably



INDIAN OVENS.





## The Camp of La Peune

seated at a table on nice folding chairs with a back. How nice and kind the English are! You ought to have seen how eagerly they offered us folding chairs and bread for lunch, and excellent biscuits and chocolate, each trying to outdo the other in their attentiveness. Lunch over, I "went off into the country." Just in front of me I saw a mule, whose strange harness attracted my attention. I came up. On either side it carried big leather bags full of water. The two front ends of the bags were prolonged into little spouts with steel taps. The man had unscrewed one of them, and the water was running into a big cup. His head and back were covered with a cloth bag and he was looking for something near the tent. This was the moment in which I caught him for a sketch. It was a most practical and convenient method of transporting water in camp.

But now it came on to rain again. For two hours I could do nothing. As dusk came on I made a sketch of an English regiment's encampment. It was placed in the pinewood near the camp. The regiment was the



WATER SKINS.

## The Camp of La Peune

7th Dragoon Guards, and here I was photographed with a group of dragoons at their request, after which I went away, for dusk was deepening and the rain was beginning again.

Next day the weather continued pretty bad. The men did not come out of their tents unless they were compelled to, and really there was nothing interesting for me to draw. I went along between the ovens and the field post-office tents looking for a subject, when an Englishman coming out of one of them, beckoned to me. I came up. He asked me particularly to do him a sketch, and of course I consented. He asked me to his tent and gave me some excellent biscuits and chocolates while I sketched him. When I had finished he signed his name and his position as postmaster. Then I told him that I would keep the signed sketch and give him an exact copy. He thanked me, very proud of the idea of having his portrait. Going out of the tent I saw opposite the Mess an Indian, squatting under a piece of canvas that was fastened to the trees. The man was surrounded



Maria Belkoff  
18 11 18

March 20 18 11 18



J. W. Staunton Postmaster  
 Camp Le Penae Post Office No. 19.  
 Morlaix France Indian Expeditionary Force

*Arthur B. Brier*  
 1919

THE POSTMASTER.



## The Camp of La Peune

by tins, and dishes carved out of wood. I began to sketch him. Then some others noticed me and three of them came up and posed beside him. There was no lack of picturesqueness. The first wore a grey jersey and a turban with a puggaree, which he pushed to one side. The second, a lad of sixteen or seventeen, wore a scarlet turban and was dressed in a sort of close-fitting vest of white cloth, buttoned down the front. His trousers, which reached to the knee, were covered with a sort of white apron; the third wore a jersey and trousers down to his boots.

After that I sketched several picturesque types, who signed their names in Hindustani. When I finished they begged it of me, saying, "Give me my sketch." My mother had to give up going about with her kodak. As soon as the Indians espied her they ran after her, crying, "Give me my photo! my photo! photo!" Little did these good folk know what a multitude of processes are needed to develop these "photos."

Then others came and stood before me. An Indian of middle height, dressed in a long khaki





## The Camp of La Peune

shirt without a belt, a pocket on the left and a disc such as soldiers wear, round his neck, begged me to sketch his son. I made a quick sketch of him, and told him afterwards that what I should have liked to sketch was his Maharajah. What was my astonishment when this man told me that he was his orderly, and that certainly the Maharajah would have no objection! What a piece of luck! And a minute before, I had been unwilling to sketch all these men drawn up before me! In that case I should not have drawn Sher Singh's orderly.

A thin drizzle had begun again. We stood under an olive tree in despair of doing anything more to-day, when suddenly we saw the Maharajah's orderly coming towards us. He greeted us with his kind smile and told us that his master invited us into his tent to take a cup of tea. This was something we had never expected. To take tea with a Maharajah! It was enough to set my imagination working. I wish I had been able to foresee this in the days when, as a child, I used to read the Eastern stories, and in my dreams imagine myself in the Indies attending the receptions of



JODHPUR LANCERS.

## The Camp of La Peune

a Maharajah,—an unreal, fairy vision, so beautiful it was. Little did I think that one day this dream would be realised !

Well, we were nicely dressed for presenting ourselves before such a personage ! Soft hats of coarse tussore, thoroughly soaked, long water-proofs, and boots plastered with clay up to the ankles.

We made our way up to the Commandant's tent—but how ? The mud was so thick that the orderly had to carry us one by one and set us down in the tent. Sher Singh stood at the entrance and could not help laughing as he beheld this pilgrimage. We made our apologies for our dainty garb, while our “porter” brushed the lumps of mud off our boots. The tent, which was very small, was lined with yellow stuff with Oriental designs in black. At the right of the door was the Maharajah's camp-bed covered with a fine Oriental rug. Opposite, at the back, were piled his portmanteau, his weapons, his folding chair with a back, while behind the head of his bed was an inlaid iron chest of fair size. What a change from the sumptuous “shamianas” (tents) of the Durbar !

## Our Indians at Marseilles

Sher Singh was with his aide-de-camp, whose face was most gentle and sympathetic, and who wore turquoises in his ears. But I only had eyes for this prince, whom I so much wanted to sketch. His curious way of folding his turban struck me. It was the first time I had seen one of the sort. Part of the turban was folded several layers thick over his right temple, cheek and ear, and kept in place by the puggaree that went round his head. I asked him of what race he was. He told me that he and all his regiment were Rajputs. The Rajputs are the most warlike, the most chivalrous, and the best-looking race of India. That did not surprise me, for three-quarters of the regiment were handsome, and Sher Singh with his radiant beauty and martial step is assuredly the type of the noble "Kshatriya" (warrior). Does not legend declare the dynasties of Udaipur and Jodhpur to be descendants of Rama, the Sun God, and conqueror of the solar race? The oval of his face is regular. His nose is slightly aquiline with finely cut, open nostrils; a thick short moustache, black as jet, covers an exquisitely

## The Camp of La Peune

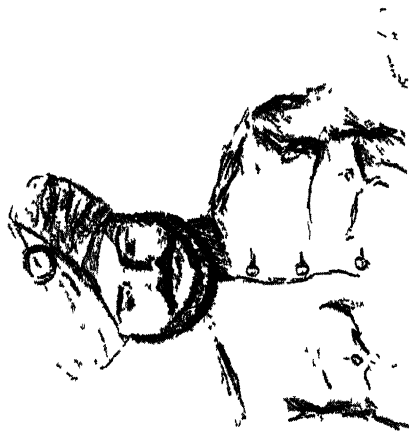
moulded mouth. The large eyes are splendid, with a deep and penetrating look—eyes of smouldering fire under their long lashes. The diamonds in his ears, the flash of his eyes, his brilliant smile, lent a sort of radiance to his face, and from his whole personality issued an impression of force and vigour, and the whole impression is most sympathetic.

Tea was brought us. We were given biscuits and jam. Between one cup and the next the Maharajah asked me to show him my sketches. I gave him my sketch-book, which he looked at and then handed to his aide-de-camp. "Very good, very fine," said Sher Singh, as he gave me back the sketch-book. I managed to convey to him that the Sikhs are like our Cossacks. At this word, great was the admiration they expressed. We were deeply touched to see these soldiers from a far country eagerly following the exploits of our brave Cossacks in the papers.

When tea was done we sat and chatted. Sher Singh in his turn showed us two splendid big photographs taken at a Rajah's Durbar. In

## Our Indians at Marseilles

a magnificent garden framed in palm trees and exotic flowers, were grouped a score of princes in their sumptuous clothes with jewelled aigrettes on their turbans, and amongst them "our" Maharajah, handsomest of them all. A ~~barly~~ Indian in spectacles came up. This was the Prince's personal physician. He talked French very well and the conversation became more lively. "What a marvellous country India must be!" I said, "and how I should love to go there!" Sher Singh smiled and turned a questioning look upon us, seeing which the doctor translated our words into Hindustani. Then he spoke rapidly to the doctor, after which the latter smiled and addressed me: "Well, you are bound to come. His Highness begs me to tell you that after the war, if he is still alive, he will come and see you—and where do you live?" (I wrote down my name and address at Paris and Marseilles and he handed this to the Maharajah.) "He will come and see you at Paris, and from there His Highness will take you with him to India; ~~you~~ you will be lodged in his palace, where you will be



9/10 June 1894 24/10/94



9/10 June 1894 24/10/94

Maxim Gorky

# TYPES OF SIKH AND RAJPUT.





## The Camp of La Peune

received as queens and heaped with pearls and diamonds !”

Oh, if only his words could come to pass !  
Then my wildest dreams would come true !

The evening was closing in and we had to leave the camp. I screwed up my courage to ask Sher Singh if he would be so kind as to let me sketch him. He smiled and appointed a sitting at one o'clock to-morrow. It was with regret that we rose to take our leave. At the moment of farewell the Maharajah suddenly stopped us and asked if we had to go through Marseilles on our way home. We said yes, whereupon he said something to the doctor, who asked my mother, “Madame, as the Prince is not allowed to leave the camp, he would be very much obliged if you would be so kind as to make him a few purchases and to bring him the *Daily Mail* every day.” “With the greatest pleasure,” replied my mother. “And will you please write down what I am to buy and how much ?”

• “As to that, come with me and I will take you to the babu who will give you all instructions.”

## Our Indians at Marseilles

After having warmly thanked the Maharajah and exchanged a cordial handshake, we followed the doctor out of the tent. A little further on, to the left of the Prince's tent, behind a huge box as flat and big as an office table, there was squatting cross-legged a comfortable little figure in spectacles, with a big round beard, a pencil behind his ear, and a pen-holder stuck in his white turban. He was in his shirt-sleeves, with a grey waistcoat. On our approach he raised his head and fixed his little blinking eyes upon us. The doctor spoke to him for a few minutes. His face lit up with a kindly, good-natured smile and he began to write down what we had to buy. Once again, what a striking type was embodied in this old babu! There are some people who, from the first moment, seem to give the impression of being types. Have you ever felt, dear readers, in reading certain novels, that they are incomplete without such or such a type? This type is quite secondary; it scarcely has any part to play; nevertheless the novel seemingly could not possibly exist without it. Well, it seems to me that the regiment of

## The Camp of La Peune

Jodhpur Lancers would be incomplete without this old babu. In fact the babu had to be there—it could not be otherwise.

After receiving all instructions we set out and on the way through Marseilles took the precaution of engaging a carriage for all that we had to bring back next day.

The next morning we had scarcely time to finish breakfast before the bell of the garden door rang. The carriage had come for us. We hastily put on our hats and waterproofs and took our lunch-basket, and off we went for our shopping. We had to buy whole reams of office paper and envelopes to match, a pair of boots for the doctor, and thousands of cigarettes. First of all we had to go to the biggest paper shop in Marseilles; then we entirely emptied a tobacco shop, buying a whole legion of big boxes of soldiers' cigarettes, and so took our way to La Peune. Once there, I went up to the camp by the road close to the church, a road consisting of stone steps, half in ruin. I went as far as the English

## Our Indians at Marseilles

Dragoons, where I asked a couple of soldiers to come down with me and help carry all our parcels. While they took the purchases, my mother paid the driver and we went up. We walked through the middle of the regiment followed by the 'curious' looks of the brave "Tommies," but at the Anglo-Indian picket we were stopped. "What have you got?" "These," replied my mother, "are purchases which Maharajah Sher Singh, Commandant of the Jodhpur Lancers, asked us to make for him." Whereupon we were allowed to pass and went straight to the mess-house. Luckily the babu was there already, and we set down everything before him. He looked through everything with care, and thanked my mother warmly. She showed him the receipted bills and he sent her to the Maharajah. At this point, wishing to write something down, my mother took a gold pencil-case out of her bag. This pleased the babu so much that he begged her to bring him ten pencils of the same kind.

We made our way painfully through the mud, each keeping the other from falling, to the

## The Camp of La Peune

Commandant's tent. Sher Singh was standing outside his tent and waved us a cheerful welcome from far off. On his head he had a soft "dread-nought" of dark green which suited him admirably, and on his feet were little Eastern slippers of leather with turned-up tips, such as many Indians wear. My mother explained to him that we had left all the purchases with the babu at the Mess-house, and handed him the receipted bills together with the *Daily Mail*. He looked at the total and an exclamation of surprise broke from him! So little! When he came to Marseilles, he had bought the same things and had to pay three times as much. It was my mother's turn to be astonished. Then the Maharajah got up, opened his strong box, which was full to the lid of English sovereigns, and repaid my mother with warm thanks for having carried out his commissions so satisfactorily. After that we went to lunch, for at one o'clock I was to sketch "our" Maharajah. By half-past twelve we had finished lunch. Another half-hour to wait! My mother went off photographing, and for my part, to kill the time

## Our Indians at Marseilles

and my impatience, I sketched a most attractive lad, the fourth son or grandson of the old Maharajah, I believe. I had hardly drawn the first few lines when I heard my mother calling. She was close to Sher Singh's tent and beckoned me to come. I hurried as fast as the slippery mud would let me. The Maharajah was finishing lunch. In one hand he held a little white plate, and with the other he was eating his chupatti with jam. The Rajahs are not allowed to use forks, knives or spoons, and it is only the necessities of camp life which compel them to restrict the prejudices of their caste by using plates instead of lotus leaves, the sacred flower of the Hindus.

Then his orderly brought him a handsome golden bowl full of water to wash his fingers in. Before pouring out the water I noticed that he made a mysterious sign over the bowl as if he were reciting a prayer. The Maharajah is only allowed to use water blessed by their priest.

I apologised for disturbing him at his meal and asked whether he did not want to rest afterwards; but Sher Singh told me I could begin at once, and

## The Camp of La Peune

asked me if I would draw him with a turban, for at the moment he was bareheaded. I begged him to put it on. The Maharajah said something to his aide-de-camp who was sitting behind, and immediately the latter gave him a long and fairly wide piece of fine cashmere, and held up a little mirror. Sher Singh stood in front of this and wound the turban round his head with great dexterity. This done he sat down on his bed and told me to begin.

I confess I was a little scared. My model was so handsome—I was so eager to draw him well, and in that case one almost always does one's worst. I hastily sketched the first outlines. During the sitting the aide-de-camp read to the Prince the *Daily Mail*.

I began by drawing his face. Would I succeed in making it like? Yes! The eyes were all right, the rest of the face was successful too. That was the main thing. Then a few broad lines for the uniform, and it was done.

I warmly thanked my princely model and handed him my sketch. "Oh, very fine!" he



## Our Indians at Marseillès

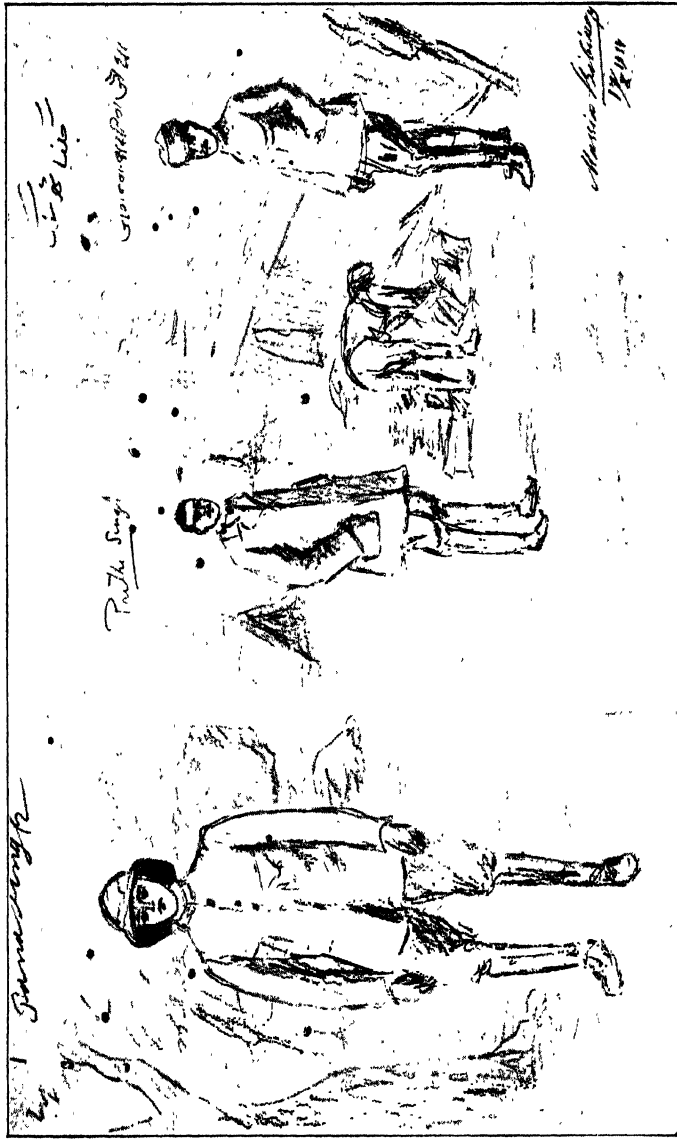
said to me with a smile. The aide-de-camp came up and said something to Sher Singh; then he spoke to me, asking if this drawing was for me or for the Prince. I replied that was as His Highness wished. Thereupon the Maharajah took my sketch, signed it with his name and title and gave it to me as a royal favour.

Indeed, I think there are not many artists, even illustrious artists, who can boast of having a drawing signed by a Maharajah.

Once more thanking him most deeply, I was rising to go when my mother came up. I showed her my sketch. Sher Singh congratulated her on my work, and took occasion to ask her to buy him some "dreadnoughts" like his own. Really my mother ought to claim the title of Purveyor to the Court of H.H. the Maharajah Sher Singh!

Then we went to see the other regiment camped on the left-hand side of the road. It was the 20th Deccan Horse, composed of Mahommedan Mahrattas. These are light-coloured, like the Sikhs, and indeed are very like the latter.

A most lovely vista opened before me. On the



DECCAN HORSE.



## The Camp of La Peune

ground, which was a little higher than the Jodhpur camp, with the latter camp below and the mountain chain as a back-ground, were scattered a quantity of bags and trusses of hay. Two or three horses tethered by long ropes to little pegs driven into the earth, and three men of the Deccan Horse came into this landscape. The one in front was a sergeant in full uniform, his sword at his side; the second was in a sort of blue caftan; the third, wearing a grey jersey, had halted as he set down the burden he was carrying, and was looking at the other camp in a typical Indian attitude.

I was going further in search of a subject when all at once I saw an Indian approaching, who beckoned me to join him. What could it be? I drew near. He held out a letter. I looked at it. It bore the address D.O. No. Office of the Inspecting Officer, Rajputana I.S. Cavalry and Transport. It contained but a few lines, requesting me to buy two quires of blotting-paper and six pen-holders, signed Biver Singh, clerk. The Indian took me to the babu, who showed me the kind of blotting-paper and pen-holders required.

## Our Indians at Marseilles

So I "took his instructions" and went back to my work. As I came near the road I saw a sentry, quite a young lad, pacing his beat with drawn sabre. Behind him extended a marvellous landscape. The plain sloped gently down to the fir-wood and viaduct. The rolling lines of the mountains, faintly blue, closed in the picture. In the foreground stood the sentry, on his left an oak that must have been centuries old, and behind this, a little further off, a horse in its blanket. This, I think, was my most successful sketch of all. But it was growing late and we had to go home.

The weather was more dismal every day. It drizzled incessantly. But we went all the same, for the Maharajah was expecting his *Daily Mail* and the "dreadnoughts," and the babu his pencils in their fine gold cases. "Our" Maharajah was engaged for the moment on an inspection of certain horses behind the Mess-house, a group of Indian officers around him as well as the English Commandant.

I used the time of waiting to give the post-



A SENTRY.



## The Camp of La Peune

master the copy of his sketch ; then after a little chat with him, I came back as far as the Mess-house, where I saw all the Rajahs assembling. It was an unrivalled opportunity for making their acquaintance, and perhaps, making a sketch of one or two of them. I went in boldly. The young "Alphonso XIII." was standing close to the door. I had been told that he was the heir to the Principality of Jodhpur. It can easily be understood how eager I was to draw the future Chief of the Rantors.

I ought to say, by the way, that the young Rajahs used to go every day to Marseilles, where they stayed until evening. To-day the weather prevented them, and I had to take advantage of this at all costs. So I went straight up to him, showed him the *Daily Mail*, and told him I had to give it to Sher Singh. Quite simply he bade me follow him, and took my waterproof, which I had on my arm, and so we walked along towards the Commander's tent. .

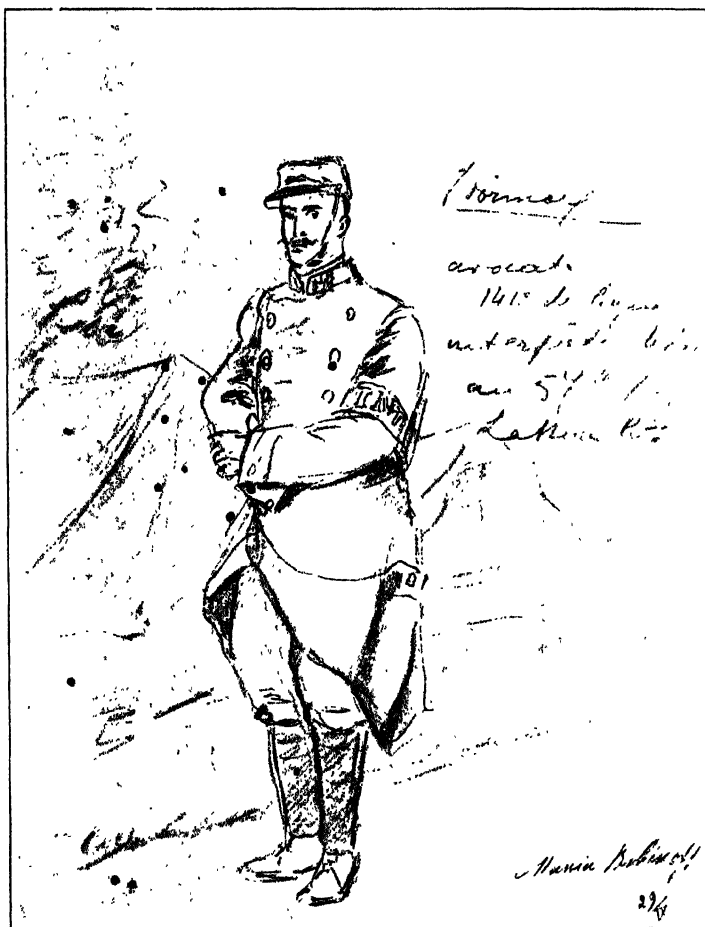
• Sher Singh was there, with his aide-de-camp. I gave him the paper, and the babu's pencils, for I



## Our Indians at Marseilles

had not seen the babu at the Mess-house. . He thanked me, and asked me how much he was indebted to me. I said, with a smile, "Nothing at all," for my mother and I were only too happy to do him a service for all his kindness to us. He begged me to convey his best thanks to my mother, and told me not to come the next day because the regiment would be getting ready to leave, but on the following morning it would give him personal pleasure if we would come to the station to see him off with his regiment. Then, taking out of his pocket two pieces of paper with Hindu characters upon them, Sher Singh wrote on one of them his name, title, and address in India, and on the other the name of the station and the time at which the regiment was leaving.

Again I thanked him warmly for all his kindness towards us and went back to the Mess-house. A French interpreter was in attendance on me. I asked him if I could sketch this young Rajah. "Yes, indeed, Mademoiselle. He is a most charming youth, very simple, and indeed he will be very pleased ; so come in." While the



A FRENCH INTERPRETER.



## The Camp of La Peune

interpreter was talking to the young prince I cast a hurried glance over the company. Before me stood an officer of about forty-five in a heavy cloth overcoat, with a soft hunting-cap of dark green on his head and pink pearls in his ears. His features were very finely cut and of great beauty ; his colour was much darker than that of Sher Singh, and his expression was severe and intent. To the right sat a very old Indian officer, strongly built, bare-headed, and in his blue shirt-sleeves. His features had a majestic stamp, but his expression was stern and authoritative. I knew this was Maharajah Sir Pertab Singh, who had offered his services in spite of his seventy years and had brought his own regiment to France at his own expense.

His reason for coming to bear his part in the great war was the hope of meeting a death worthy of a warrior chief of the Rahtor Rajputs.

In sober truth, looking at this worthy descendant of the conquerors of Aurungzebe, who had already had a long and glorious military career, one beheld the vision of one of those great warrior

## Our Indians at Marseilles

chieftains of the past, whose exploits stirred us so deeply in our childhood.

My young prince was willing, and I made haste to set to work. He took his position obediently, as I requested, beside the wall on the left, in profile, resting his elbow on the manger which happened to be there. (Probably the little house had been the farm stable.) He turned his head towards me; the interpreter stood beside him, and thus conversing with him my model was able to escape boredom. When it was done I asked him particularly to sign his name, and he did so with most pleasing readiness.

Really, since leaving Russia, it was the first time I had seen people of such cordiality, so simple and gracious as these Indian Princes, of whom I shall always keep the warmest memories. I showed my sketch to everybody, and all seemed amused with it. I screwed up my courage to ask the officer with the pink pearls if I might do him, but he was less easy-going and would not let himself be sketched. What if I had the rare luck to draw Sir Pertab Singh himself? I begged the



DALPAT SINGH.



## The Camp of La Peune

interpreter to ask him, but he said I must not even dream of it. What a pity ! But still I had nothing to complain of. I proceeded to sketch the second young Rajah beside the Mess-house with another Indian, and both signed their names. Then several Indians came and posed. One was very handsome. I sketched them. Afterwards I showed them the sketch of Dalpat Singh, the young prince. " Oh, Rajah, Rajah ! " they cried, in tones of inconceivable veneration. This deep feeling for their prince vividly recalled our own for our Little Father the Czar.

At this point my mother returned, for it was lunch-time. She told me how she had taken the " dreadnoughts " to the Maharajah, and how the latter, being called away and not wishing to make her wait, gave the key of his strong box to the first man he found near, telling him to repay her. How often had she already seen Sher Singh do the same thing—a most striking proof of the honesty of the Indians ! To think that there are people who think they are not to be trusted !

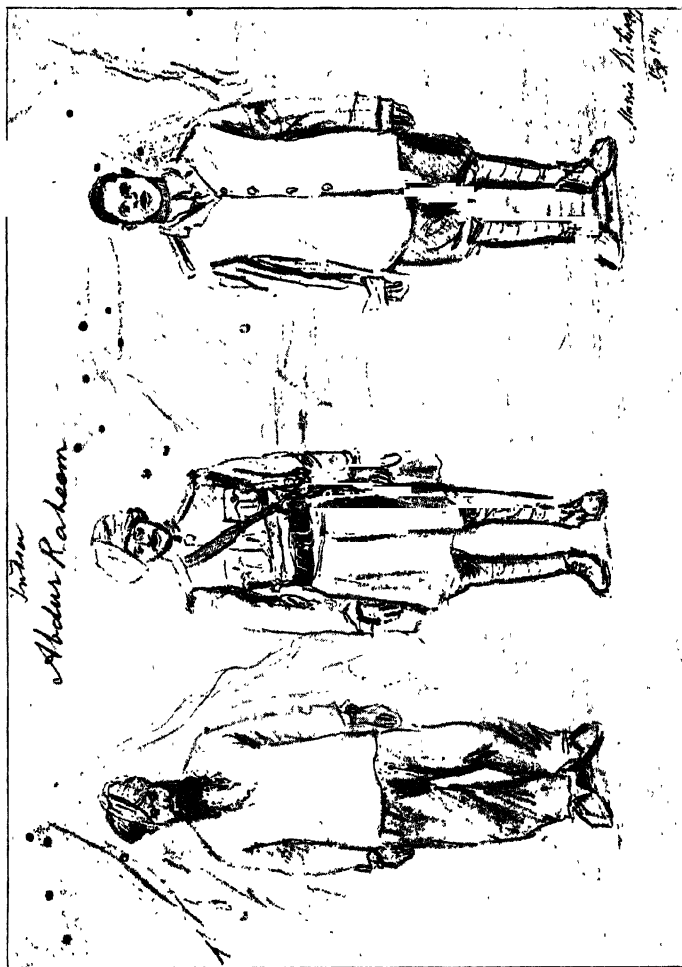


## Our Indians at Marseilles

After lunch we went to the 20th Deccan Horse. As usual we were talking Russian to each other ; what was our astonishment to hear Russian being spoken behind us ! We turned round and saw an English officer, smiling. He was amused by our surprise. We questioned him eagerly. It turned out that he had been a long time in Russia, at Petrograd and Moscow, and had carried away ineffaceable memories of them. He knew the gypsies, and was full of enthusiasm for our country. Imagine our delight to hear this. It was the second time it had happened to us.

He looked at my sketches and in the course of conversation invited us to come and take a cup of tea in their Mess-house at four o'clock.

Then I went off to work. I did a soldier in full uniform ; a long-bearded Indian in a scarlet turban ; a native ambulance man. But a deluge of rain came on and interrupted my work. I took refuge beside two Indians who covered me with their capes. At this moment an officer came out of the Mess-house and led me in. He wore long indiarubber boots such as Dalpat Singh had



AMONG THE DECCAN HORSE.



## The Camp of La Peune

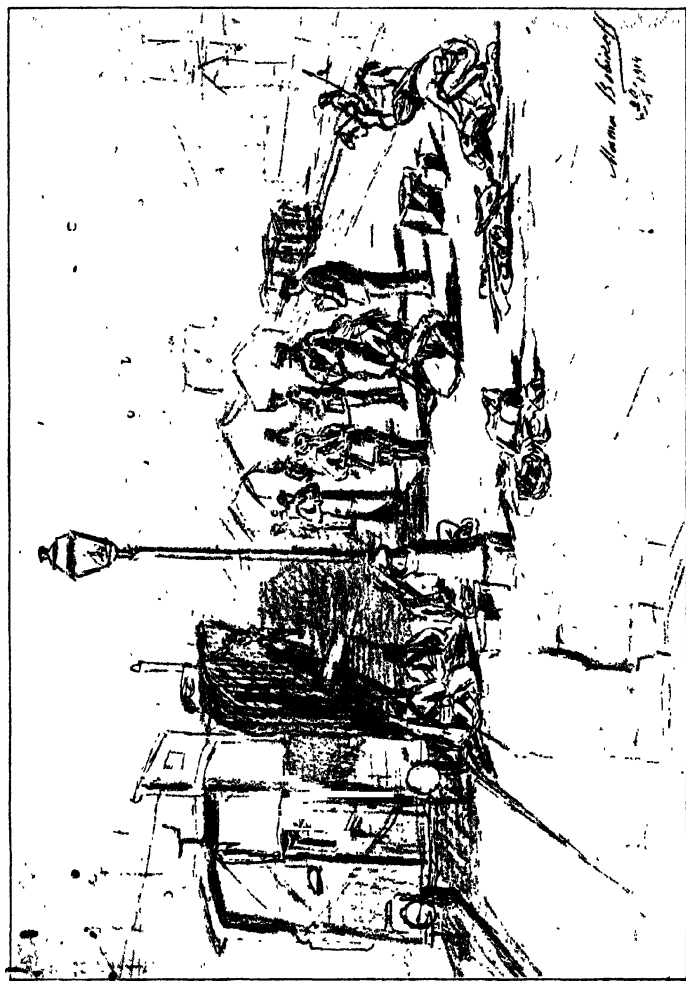
worn. My mother was there already, and soon an Indian "boy" brought us tea. Several officers were present. We chatted and I showed my sketches. When they saw the sketches of Sher Singh and Dalpat Singh they could not hide their astonishment. "The Rajahs don't let themselves be done so easily," they said. It went on raining heavily and we stayed quite a long time in the long wide hospitable tent. As soon as the rain ceased, we thanked these kind and sympathetic officers and hurried home, for we were beginning to get wet through.

"Our" regiment was to start at 8.15 this morning. At a quarter to, our cab drew up at the entrance of the Arenc station, whence the Indians were to start. Showing the man on duty our permit from the Commandant of the Sea Front, we went on to the departure platform. We were struck by a smell of sardines, ropes and tarred timbers. It was a typical harbour station. A great part of the regiment was there already. On the long platform, blocked on the left by a

## Our Indians at Marseilles

long train that was to carry off our models, was one mass of bags, portmanteaux, trusses of hay, stands of rifles, and groups of smart Jodhpur Lancers. A brilliant sun lighted the whole picture, and in the limpid atmosphere of this beautiful autumn morning every detail stood out with wonderful clearness. My mother was near one group of men, trying to photograph them; on seeing this the station-master took his place among them, and this was the group that I sketched, including my mother with her kodak levelled.

By this time they began putting the horses one by one into the trucks just where I was standing. I went further off, and a fine group came into sight; the officer with the pink pearls was giving an order with his arm outstretched! Nearer at hand the interpreter was talking to the Indian Colonel, and close to them were some piled rifles with a horse-blanket thrown over them. I sketched rapidly; then I drew the Colonel with several Indians beside him and behind him in field kit. Then some more mounted men arrived with



Mama B. B. B. B.  
1882/1883

THE HARBOUR STATION.

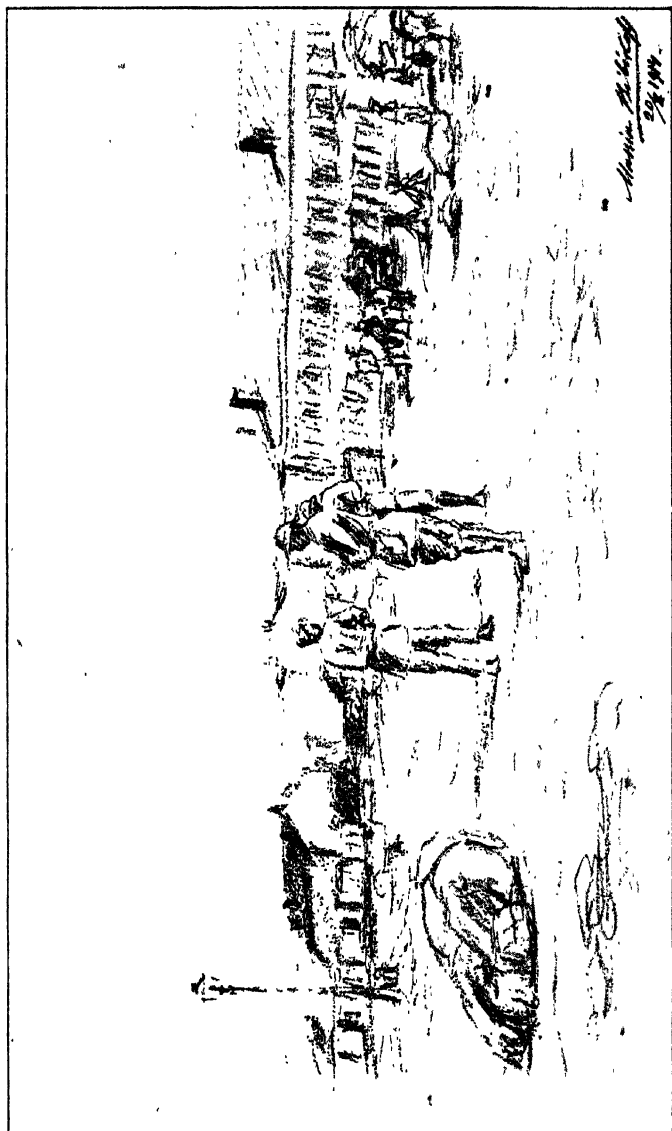


## The Camp of La Peune

their lances, carrying their carbines in leather cases on the left side of their saddles and broad leather cross-belts for bandoliers round their horses' withers.

Soon the turmoil became too great. The horses were being put into the horse-boxes. Some reared, and refused to go in. There were shouts and oaths in Hindustani, and several sturdy fellows pushed the unruly animals vigorously into the trucks. Some carried sacks, others rifles, others a whole stack of lances like bundles of reeds. It was like a living ant-heap. Everything was astir, moving to and fro; men were shouting and gesticulating, and there was an endless flicker of light on men and horses, weapons and baggage in the dazzling sunshine. I stood close to a first-class carriage reserved for the officers. But where could Sher Singh be? Where were the young officers? It was nearly nine already, and he was due to go in a few minutes; I was in despair at not seeing "our" Maharajah again for the last time. The poor flowers I had brought for him were beginning to wilt in my hand. At this





PREPARING TO ENTRAIN.

## The Camp of La Peune

moment, to my delight the Colonel and the doctor came up to me. I made haste to ask them about Sher Singh. They reassured me by saying that only part of the regiment was going off just now, and the rest with Sher Singh at its head was going an hour later. Maharajah Sir Pertab Singh with his sons had gone off ahead in a special train.

My anxiety was over and I showed the sketches I had just been doing. They congratulated me on them and were astonished at my speed. Then my mother came up also. But the train was ready. The last remaining men disappeared into the carriages. On the departure platform, which had grown empty, a few railway officials were giving the last touches before the start. Trails of straw and hay littered the ground ; the noisy turmoil of the last minutes had been succeeded by the calm which always comes before the moment of the starting-whistle. As the Colonel and the doctor came up to the carriage, I hurriedly pulled out a handful of pinks which I gave them with my best wishes for a good journey.



THE TURMOIL OF DEPARTURE.

## The Camp of La Peune

They shook hands cordially with us and got into the carriage. • Up came the station-master. One last look at the train and the whistle sounded. Up to the very last moment, whilst I saw all my Indians passing by, whilst I saw their jolly bronze faces smiling at me with their dazzling teeth, I could not believe that we had to part immediately. It was inconceivable.

But when I heard the engine answer the station-master's whistle and saw the train steadily get under way my heart was torn with sharp and keen regret. That whistle scattered the most beautiful dream of my life, in which I had lived for six days, a dream that carried me into a world somewhat more beautiful and fairy-like than our materialistic century. . . . The last turbaned heads gave me a friendly nod from the little windows, and soon the train disappeared behind a curve among sheds and water-tanks and stacks of coal, while I stayed behind, motionless, with a feeling of having woke up from a beautiful dream.

When my mother rejoined me, the station-master also came up and asked her to give him the

## Our Indians at Marseilles.

photograph where he appeared in a group. She promised, and asked him where the second portion of the regiment would come. At that moment two Indians came up, carrying a box, and seemingly in search of something. An English officer asked what they wanted. They pointed out that they had to cross over to the other platform. The officer went up to the station-master and asked him to take them over to the train, because he himself could not stay. The station-master also was busy, and pointed to us, "These ladies are just going to the other platform—Mesdames, will you have the kindness to take these two Indians with you?" And so we walked along all the platforms, crossed the line and came close to the train that was waiting for the Indians. We posted ourselves close to the entrance to see the whole line of cavalry coming in with their lances.

The time seemed very long. It was only a quarter past nine, and they were not to arrive till ten. So we sat down on the stone base of the railings and, to while away the time, I began to touch up my sketches which had been too hurriedly



*Marion Holcomb*  
*2/2/1919*

GROUP AT THE STATION



## · The Camp of La Peune

made. The hour drew near. I went out a little way to look, and suddenly a multitude of lance points were glittering in the sun. At last! A long line of cavalry on their beautiful Arab horses—delicate, nervous creatures—unrolled its khaki ribbon, winding between the trams and commissariat wagons and camp material which accompanied them. I looked for Sher Singh. Sitting proudly on a splendid chestnut that shone with coppery gleams, I saw “our” Maharajah, the diamonds in his ears darting out flashes of fire in the brilliant sun. In this guise, splendid and majestic, wearing his sword in a scabbard of buffalo hide and escorted by this column of bronze horsemen with their glittering lances, he seemed to be a prince of legend starting for an epic adventure. . . . But he drew near. I went to meet him and presented the bouquet with my warmest good wishes. He bowed to us several times with the greatest kindness, and halting, to the astonishment of all around, renewed his promise of coming to Paris, and once more thanked my mother for all the commissions she had so



## Our Indians at Marseilles

kindly made for him. Then he went on and we saw him look back to us till the horsemen hid us from his eyes.

It was ended. This time it was really the whole regiment that had gone—and the Maharajahs too.

At this thought I nearly wept. It was as if something had been torn out of myself—I felt such an affection for all these kind and gallant soldiers, who left me the keenest and deepest and most radiant memory of my life.

## ENVOY

GONE are those gallant sons of the "Land of Marvels" : passing like a brilliant meteor in a scene of festival, and leaving us with the sense of wonderment and a heightened imagination.

In our mundane and prosaic century, when all countries are gradually losing their original character and tend to imitate one another, these bronze-hued soldiers have brought before our eyes a country full of every contrast and every marvel—a country as old as the world, which, in spite of the invasions, it has suffered in the course of its long history, has kept unsullied the deep life-spring of its soul, preserving it like the sacred fire which burns before its idols.

They brought us some of the clear skies of the East into the dim and colourless skies of our era. Chivalrous Kshatriyas, descendants of the Sun,

## Our Indians at Marseilles

they threw a ray of warmth over all our petty, material cares, which embitter the heart and stifle imagination. They awakened in us childhood's memories, that season of fairy stories and wonder.

As for myself, when dusk spread over all the wide spaces of the camp and I saw the men squatting round the fires, their bronze faces lit by the light of the flames, the long-forgotten stories of the Arabian Nights came back into my memory with marvellous clearness.

Heaven knows if we shall ever see them again, or what will be the issue of the mighty events we are witnessing, but I think those who have seen them will not soon forget these soldiers from a distant land, who have come from the other end of the world to fight our common foe for the triumph of right and justice.

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